

APPLICATION UNDER UNITED STATES PATENT LAWS

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Invention: CONTROLLED COOLING OF INPUT WATER BY DISSOCIATION OF HYDRATE IN AN ARTIFICIALLY PRESSURIZED ASSISTED DESALINATION FRACTIONATION APPARATUS

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- Provisional Application
- Regular Utility Application
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SPECIFICATION

CONTROLLED COOLING OF INPUT WATER BY DISSOCIATION OF
HYDRATE IN AN ARTIFICIALLY PRESSURIZED ASSISTED
DESALINATION FRACTIONATION APPARATUS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 [0001] This application claims priority from U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/214,262 filed on June 26, 2000. This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 09/500,422 entitled "DESALINATION AND CONCOMITANT CARBON DIOXIDE CAPTURE YIELDING LIQUID CARBON DIOXIDE" and filed on February 9, 2000, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No.09/397,500 "DESALINATION USING

10 10 POSITIVELY BUOYANT OR NEGATIVELY BUOYANT/ASSISTED BUOYANT HYDRATE" and filed on September 17, 1999; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 09/375,410, entitled "LAND-BASED DESALINATION USING POSITIVELY BUOYANT OR NEGATIVELY BUOYANT/ASSISTED BUOYANCY HYDRATE" and filed on August 17, 1999; which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application

15 15 Serial No. 09/350,906, entitled "LAND-BASED DESALINATION USING BUOYANT HYDRATE" and filed on July 12, 1999.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

20 [0002] In general, the invention relates to desalination or other purification of water using hydrates to extract fresh water from saline or polluted water. In particular, the invention relates to the manner in which pressurization suitable for spontaneous hydrate formation is attained. More particularly, the invention relates to combining both natural and artificial pressurization in the desalination apparatus to achieve pressurization suitable for the formation of hydrate. The invention also relates to directing the water flow and managing the movement of hydrate to obtain maximum efficient cooling of the water to be treated either by horizontal movement

25 through cooling stages during dissociation or by rising within the area of dissociation.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

30 [0003] In general, desalination and purification of saline or polluted water using buoyant gas hydrates is known in the art. See, for example, U.S. Patent No. 5,873,262 and accepted South African Patent Application No. 98/5681, the disclosures of which are incorporated by reference. According to this approach to water desalination or purification, a gas or mixture of gases which spontaneously forms buoyant gas hydrate when mixed with water at sufficiently high

depth-induced pressures and/or sufficiently low temperatures is mixed with water to be treated at the relatively deep base of a treatment column. According to prior technology, the treatment column is located at sea. Because the hydrate is positively buoyant, it rises through the column into warmer water and lower pressures. As the hydrate rises, it becomes unstable and 5 disassociates into pure water and the positively buoyant hydrate-forming gas or gas mixture. The purified water is then extracted and the gas is processed and reused for subsequent cycles of hydrate formation. (Where the wet gas may be used for some other purpose, such as power generation nearby, it may prove unnecessary to process the gas and instead to use the gas in a pass-through mode; in this way, only the small amount of gas not recovered is an operating cost.)

10 Suitable gases include, among others, methane, ethane, propane, butane, and mixtures thereof.

[0004] The previously known methods of desalination or purification using buoyant gas hydrates rely on the naturally high pressures and naturally low temperatures that are found at open ocean depths below 450 to 500 meters when using pure methane, or somewhat shallower when using mixed gases to enlarge the hydrate stability "envelope," and the desalination 15 installations are essentially immobile once constructed, being fixed to pipelines carrying fresh water to land. In certain marine locations such as the Mediterranean Sea, however, the water is not cold enough for the requisite pressure to be found at a shallow enough depth; this would necessitate using a much longer column, which is impractical. Moreover, many places where fresh water is at a premium are located adjacent to wide, shallow water continental shelves where 20 a marine desalination apparatus would have to be located a great distance offshore. Furthermore, a fixed installation is somewhat less versatile than a mobile installation would be. Additionally, the known methodologies have all required the hydrate, *per se*, to be buoyant in order to collect the hydrate and the fresh water released therefrom in an efficient manner.

[0005] In addition to using hydrates for desalination, it is also known to use hydrates to 25 capture carbon dioxide from gas mixtures such as power plant emissions formed by burning fossil fuels by selectively forming carbon dioxide hydrates and then disposing of the carbon dioxide hydrates in an environment where the hydrate remains stable, *e.g.*, at the bottom of the ocean. See, for example, U.S. Patents Nos. 5,660,603, 5,562,891, and 5,397,553. Although such deep-sea disposal of carbon dioxide in the form of hydrate might be economically feasible 30 where the hydrate is formed at or near the sea (*e.g.*, on an oil rig or aboard a ship or at a seaside factory), it is far less economically feasible when the hydrate is produced inland. This is because of the expense of transporting the carbon dioxide-containing hydrate to the disposal location, the substantial majority of the weight and volume of which hydrate consists of water. (Carbon

dioxide hydrate, like methane hydrate and other type I hydrates contains about 85% water on a molecular basis. In other words, about 85% of the molecules in these hydrates are water and about 15% of the molecules are gas molecules. The exact proportions vary slightly and are related to the degree of occupation of the 'guest' lattice sites in which the gas molecules reside.)

5 Thus, the cost of such deep-sea disposal of carbon dioxide-bearing hydrate is increased substantially due to the cost of transporting (unnecessarily, as demonstrated by the present invention) the additional weight and volume of the water in the hydrate. Additionally, the previously known teachings of disposing of carbon dioxide via carbon dioxide hydrate completely ignores and therefore fails to take advantage of the tremendous capacity to obtain
10 desalinated or otherwise purified water by means of forming and then melting (i.e., causing to dissociate) the carbon dioxide hydrates.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The various inventions disclosed herein overcome one or more of the limitations
15 associated with the prior art and greatly expand the use and benefits of the hydrate desalination fractionation method by providing for land-based or mobile installation-based desalination of seawater (or other purification of polluted water) that is supplied to the installation and using either positively or negatively buoyant hydrate. The methods of the invention can be employed where input water is too warm or where suitably deep ocean depths are not available within
20 reasonable distances for ocean-based desalination to be performed using gas hydrate, and may be carried out using a gas or gas mixture or even a liquid which produces either positively or negatively buoyant hydrate. Additionally, the invention can be practiced using carbon dioxide obtained from, e.g., industrial exhaust gases, thereby simultaneously providing purified water and capturing the carbon dioxide in the most efficient form for disposal (or other use, if so desired).
25 [0007] The inventive methods entail cooling the seawater to sufficiently low temperatures for hydrate to form at the bottom of a desalination fractionation column at pressure-depths and temperatures appropriate for the particular hydrate-forming material being used. A preferred embodiment capitalizes on the property of the hydrate that the amount of heat given off during formation of the hydrate at depth is essentially equal to the amount of heat absorbed by
30 the hydrate as it dissociates (melts) back into pure water and a hydrate-forming material. In particular, as liquid or gas forms hydrate, and as the hydrate crystals rise through the water column (either due to inherent buoyancy of the hydrate or "assisted" by gas trapped within a hydrate mesh shell) and continue to grow, heat released during formation of the hydrate will heat

the surrounding seawater in the column. As the hydrate rises in the water column and pressure on it decreases, the hydrate dissociates endothermically -- the hydrate formation is driven primarily by the increased pressure at depth -- and absorbs heat from the surrounding water column. Ordinarily, the heat energy absorbed during dissociation of the hydrate would be

5 essentially the same heat energy released during exothermic formation of the hydrate such that there would be essentially no net change in the amount of heat energy in the system.

[0008] According to the invention, however, heat energy that is liberated during formation of the hydrate is removed from the system by removing residual saline water from the water column, which residual saline water has been heated by the heat energy released during 10 exothermic formation of the hydrate. Because formation of the hydrate is primarily pressure driven (as opposed to temperature driven), the hydrate becomes unstable under reduced pressures as it rises through the water column, and it dissociates endothermically. Because some heat energy released during exothermic crystallization has been removed from the system, the hydrate will absorb heat from other sources as it melts, thereby creating a cooling bias. The preferred 15 embodiment of the invention capitalizes on this cooling bias by passing the source water through the dissociation region of the water column, in heat-exchanging relationship therewith, so as to cool the source or supply water to temperatures sufficiently low for hydrate to form at the base of the installation.

[0009] As noted above, the invention may be practiced using liquid, gas, or gas mixtures 20 which produce either positively buoyant hydrate or negatively buoyant hydrate. In the case of positively buoyant hydrate, the hydrate crystals themselves are positively buoyant and will rise naturally upon formation, upwardly through a desalination fractionation column at the top of which the hydrate dissociates into fresh water and the gas or gas mixture. In the case of negatively buoyant hydrate, on the other hand, the hydrate crystals, *per se*, are denser than the 25 surrounding seawater and therefore ordinarily would tend to sink. By controlling the injection of the gas (or gas mixture) or liquid which produces the hydrate such that hydrate formation is incomplete, bubbles of the gas or the less-dense-than-seawater liquid are trapped within a mesh shell of hydrate, and overall positive buoyancy of the shell will cause the hydrate to rise within the water column.

30 [0010] Preferably, the rising assisted-buoyancy hydrate (negatively buoyant hydrate intimately intermixed with positively buoyant gas or liquid bubbles) is diverted laterally over a "catch basin" so that the hydrate does not fall back down to the formation portion of the desalination fractionation column once the mesh shell disintegrates during dissociation. Solid,

negatively buoyant hydrate, which has settled to a catch sump at the base of the apparatus, is pumped to the top of the catch basin, where it dissociates into gas and fresh water. (If so desired, forming the negatively buoyant hydrate in a slightly different manner will cause all the hydrate to settle in the sump, from which it is pumped to the dissociation/heat exchange catch basin.)

5 [0011] In alternative embodiments of the invention, the input water may or may not be passed through the dissociating hydrate in heat-exchanging relationship therewith to be cooled. In either case, the input water is (further) cooled using other, artificial means of refrigeration, the degree to which such cooling is necessary being in part a function of the buoyant or non-buoyant nature of the hydrate. Some heat energy is removed from the system by removing warmed water
10 which has circulated around the desalination fractionation column in a water jacket and which has been heated by heat released during hydrate formation.

15 [0012] In the various embodiments of the invention, the purified water will be extremely cool. Advantageously, this cooled water, which preferably will be used as potable water, can itself be used as a heat sink to provide cooling, e.g., refrigeration as a basis for air conditioning in hot climates.

20 [0013] An additional advantage of land-based desalination or water purification according to the invention is that the installation is not subject to disturbances caused by foul weather and bad sea conditions nearly to the same extent as a marine site might be. Additionally, access to an installation on land is far easier than access to a marine-based installation. Gas handling and storage facilities are more practicable on land, where there is more space and a
25 more secure engineering environment available. Construction is easier on land, and security may be improved as compared to a marine-based installation.

30 [0014] Moreover, because considerable amounts of residual seawater may be extracted from the system (to remove heat energy from the system), the hydrate slurry will be concentrated. This means that there will be less saline water in the upper, dissociation regions of the dissociation fractionation column, and therefore there will be less residual seawater for the hydrate to mix with as it dissociates. Thus, less salt will be present to contaminate the fresh water produced by dissociation of the hydrate.

35 [0015] Furthermore, because the residual seawater preferably is recirculated through the desalination fractionation column one or more times, other components such as trace elements which are in the seawater (e.g., gold) may be concentrated so that recovery from the seawater becomes practical. Additionally, the concentrated seawater may itself be useful or desirable. For example, marine aquarists might purchase such concentrated seawater to use for mixing

replacement water for their aquaria, and such concentrated seawater would facilitate recreating the specific microcosm from which it was extracted.

[0016] In further embodiments, the desalination installation is constructed so that the hydrate dissociation occurs while the hydrate is still at some depth, such that it is still under considerable pressure, and the hydrate-forming gas is captured at this depth and processed for reuse while still at such pressures. Considerable efficiencies of operation are obtained with such arrangements.

[0017] In still further embodiments of the invention, rather than relying on the weight of a long column of water to create pressures appropriate for hydrate formation, the inventive methods may be practiced using self-contained, sealed hydrate formation/separation and hydrate dissociation/heat exchange vessels, which vessels are mechanically pressurized using appropriate hydraulic pumping systems. Such mechanically pressurized installations can be made comparatively mobile and may be used to provide the benefits of the invention in highly diverse settings. Moreover, such mechanically pressurized systems can be used to control the dissociation of the hydrate so that, when using carbon dioxide as the hydrate-forming medium, for example -- particularly when the carbon dioxide is provided by means of and is to be captured and sequestered from exhaust gases (e.g., industrial source exhaust gases) -- the carbon dioxide released upon hydrate dissociation can be in either the liquid state or the gaseous state.

[0018] In still further embodiments of the invention, a desalination apparatus is disclosed

20 which utilizes both natural and artificial pressurization in the desalination apparatus to achieve pressurization suitable for the spontaneous formation of hydrate. One of the disadvantages of a desalination fractionation column where pressure is derived entirely from the weight of water and where dissociation of hydrate takes place in the upper part of the apparatus at pressures as low as one atmosphere at its very top is that the shaft must be deep enough to provide for the whole of

25 the pressurization for spontaneous hydrate formation. This may necessitate a high construction and maintenance cost. One of the disadvantages of a desalination fractionation apparatus where pressure is derived entirely from artificial pressurization is that the whole of the apparatus must operate safely at the full working and test pressures. This may cause the apparatus to be so strongly built that costs are higher than if it could be built to contain lower pressures.

[0019] By combining both artificial pressurization and natural pressurization, benefits can be gained. Specifically, the lower part of any shaft is disproportionately expensive to construct and maintain in comparison to the upper part. By combining natural and artificial pressurization in this embodiment, effectively only a shorter shaft need be constructed because

the pressure at the top of the shaft is already elevated. Thus, the pressure at the base of the shaft where hydrate is formed is the sum of the artificial and natural pressurization and pressures suitable for the formation of gas hydrate can be reached at depths below the surface that are substantially less than those that would be necessary with no artificial pressurization. In addition, 5 construction of the upper part of the desalination fractionation column can be achieved for much lower cost at the lower pressures of the partially pressurized system.

[0020] In still other embodiments of the invention, a dissociation section of the desalination apparatus is disclosed which facilitates managing the water flow within the dissociation area so as to obtain optimum temperatures for the input water. In particular, by 10 controlling the direction of water flow and its general trend of motion within the dissociation chamber, the final input water can be cooled to below the temperature of much of the produced fresh water in the desalination fractionation apparatus which creates greater overall efficiencies in the desalination fractionation apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 [0021] The invention will now be described in greater detail in connection with the drawings, in which:

[0022] FIG. 1 is a generalized, diagrammatic depiction of a land-based desalination installation;

20 [0023] FIG. 2 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a desalination fractionation column which utilizes positively buoyant hydrate and which may be employed in the installation shown in FIG. 1;

[0024] FIGS. 3 and 4 are diagrammatic, side elevation views showing two alternative heat extraction portions of a desalination fractionation column employed in the installation shown in FIG. 1;

25 [0025] FIG. 5 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of another embodiment of a desalination fractionation column which utilizes positively buoyant hydrate and which may be employed in the installation shown in FIG. 1;

[0026] FIG. 6 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view showing overlapping water vents used in the desalination fractionation column shown in FIG. 5;

30 [0027] FIG. 7 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of yet another embodiment of a buoyant hydrate-based desalination fractionation column employed in the installation shown in FIG. 1, which embodiment is similar to that shown in FIG. 5.

[0028] FIG. 8 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a desalination fractionation column which permits the utilization of negatively buoyant hydrate and which may be employed in the installation shown in FIG. 1;

[0029] FIGS. 9 and 10 are schematic, isometric and end views, respectively, of the 5 dissociation and heat exchange portion of the desalination fractionation column shown in FIG. 8;

[0030] FIG. 11 is a Pressure/Temperature diagram depicting regions of CO₂ hydrate stability, the CO₂ liquids, and the operating envelope for a negatively buoyant, CO₂ hydrate-based desalination system;

[0031] FIG. 12. is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of a residual fluid replacement 10 section designed to facilitate washing of the hydrate slurry;

[0032] FIG. 13 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of another embodiment of a desalination fractionation column which permits the utilization of a negatively buoyant hydrate, which embodiment facilitates separation of residual seawater from the negatively buoyant hydrate;

15 [0033] FIG. 14 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of a slurry holding, fluid separation apparatus used in the installation of FIG. 13;

[0034] FIG. 15 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a desalination fractionation column configured to maintain the hydrate-forming gas at elevated pressure;

20 [0035] FIG. 16 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a mechanically pressurized desalination system configured to use positively buoyant hydrate;

[0036] FIG. 17 is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a mechanically pressurized desalination system which is similar to that shown in FIG. 16 but which is configured to use negatively buoyant hydrate;

25 [0037] FIG. 18. is a diagrammatic, side elevation view of an embodiment of a mechanically pressurized desalination system configured to use either positively or negatively buoyant hydrate;

[0038] FIG. 19 is a generalized, diagrammatic depiction of a mechanically pressurized desalination system located on a ship;

30 [0039] FIG. 20 is schematic diagram illustrating the components of a system configured to produce liquid carbon dioxide and fresh water using industrial exhaust gas as the supply of carbon dioxide to form hydrate;

[0040] FIG. 21 is a phase diagram illustrating the relative pressure/temperature conditions at which hydrogen sulfide and carbon dioxide hydrate form;

[0041] FIG. 22 is a schematic diagram illustrating a dissociation vessel in which carbon dioxide hydrate is allowed to dissociate so as to produce liquid carbon dioxide and fresh water;

[0042] FIG. 23 is a phase diagram illustrating P-T pathways along which carbon dioxide hydrate is allowed to dissociate in the dissociation vessel shown in FIG. 22; and

5 [0043] FIG. 24 is a graph illustrating the variation in density of liquid carbon dioxide with varying pressure.

[0044] FIG. 25 is a diagrammatic side elevation view of an embodiment of a partially artificially pressurized desalination fractionation column which utilizes positively buoyant or assisted positively buoyant hydrate.

10 [0045] FIG. 26 is a schematic side elevation view of an embodiment which provides for syphoning of seawater to a desalination fractionation site that is below sea level where the head of water in the depression from about sea level to the distance below sea level in the depression provides for the artificial pressurization component of the overall pressure in the desalination fractionation column.

15 [0046] FIG. 27 is a schematic side elevation of a dissociation/heat exchange section of a desalination fractionation apparatus which provides for stage cooling of input water passing in a generally horizontal manner through the dissociation/heat exchange section of the hydrate dissociation stage.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

20 [0047] A land-based desalination installation is shown schematically in FIG. 1 in generalized fashion. The installation may be divided roughly into three sections or regions: an intake portion 10; a water purification portion 12; and post-processing and downstream usage section 14.

25 [0048] The intake portion 10 consists essentially of the apparatus and various subinstallations necessary to extract seawater from the ocean 16 and transport it to the desalination/purification installation at region 12, including subaqueous water intake piping 18 and pumping means (not shown) to draw the water from the ocean and pump it to shore for subsequent processing. Large volume installations can be located relatively close to the sea to reduce the piping distance of the input water to a minimum, and establishing the installation as close to sea level as possible will reduce the cost of pumping against pressure head.

30 [0049] The intake pipeline 18 preferably extends sufficiently out to sea that it draws deep water, e.g., from the slope 20 of the continental shelf because deep water is more pure and colder

than shallow water. Alternatively, water may be drawn from locations closer to land, e.g., from areas on the continental shelf 22 where the distance across the shallow water is too great for practice. The precise depth from which water is drawn will ultimately be determined by a number of factors, including primarily the specific embodiment of the desalination fractionation 5 column which is employed, as described below. Ideally, the desalination installation, *per se*, is located so that the highest part of the fluid-handling system is at or below sea-level to reduce the costs of intake pumping.

[0050] Additionally, the water may be pretreated at a pretreatment station 24.

Pretreatment consists mainly of de-aeration, filtering to remove particulate matter and degassing, 10 consistent with the requirement that material necessary for hydrate nucleation and growth not be removed from the water.

[0051] A preferred embodiment of the purification installation 30, *per se*, is illustrated in FIGS. 2, 3, and 4, which embodiment utilizes positively buoyant hydrate to extract fresh water from seawater. Seawater is pumped into the installation 130 at water input 32 and is pumped 15 down to the lower, hydrate formation section 34 of the installation. The bottom of the hydrate formation section is no more than about 800 meters deep, and perhaps even shallower (again depending on the particular gas or gas mixture being used). A suitable, positively buoyant hydrate-forming gas (or liquid) is injected into the hydrate formation section at 36, and positively buoyant hydrate 38 spontaneously forms and begins to rise through the water column, as is 20 known in the art.

[0052] The hydrate-forming gas can be pumped using sequential, in-line, intermediate pressure pumps, with the gas conduit extending either down through the fractionation column, *per se*, or down through the input water line so that gas line pressure is counteracted by ambient water pressure. As a result, it is not necessary to use expensive, high pressure gas pumps located 25 on the surface. Alternatively, once a gas has been liquefied, it can be pumped to greater depths without further significant compression.

[0053] Hydrate formation (crystallization) is an exothermic process. Accordingly, as the positively buoyant hydrate forms and rises automatically through the water column -- forming a hydrate "slurry" as hydrate crystals continue to nucleate and grow as they rise, until the hydrate-forming gas is used up -- the surrounding water, which will increasingly become a concentrated 30 saline "residue," will be heated by the heat energy released during crystallization of the hydrate.

[0054] Below a certain salinity, the heated residual seawater will have a relatively decreased density and will rise in the column along with the hydrate 38. When the salinity of the

residual seawater rises high enough due to the extraction of fresh water from it, however, the highly saline residual seawater will sink to the bottom of the water column. This highly saline residual seawater is collected in sump 40 at the bottom of the fractionation column and is removed.

5 [0055] As the slurry of hydrate and heated residual seawater rises in the fractionation column, heated residual seawater is removed from the system in heat extraction portion 44 of the fractionation column at one or more points 46. The heat extraction section 44 is shown in greater detail in FIG. 3. As illustrated in FIG. 3, for one mode of separation of hydrate and slurry, water is pumped from the system as part of the vertical fractionation process. This is accomplished
10 through a two-stage process. An internal sleeve 45 allows a primary separation to take place, as a water trap 49 is formed below the top of the sleeve. Hydrate continues to rise, while water floods the entire section 44. Water is pumped from below the level at which hydrate exits from the top of the sleeve through fine conical screens 47. These are designed to obstruct the passage of particulate hydrate. (The screens can be heated periodically to clear them of hydrate when flow
15 restriction exceeds design limits.) Residual water is drawn off at a slow enough rate that any hydrate that may reside within water drawn toward the screen has a greater tendency to rise buoyantly than the tendency toward downwards or sideways movement associated with the force of suction of the drawn-off water. Very buoyant gas rises and stays within the column.

[0056] An alternative configuration 44' of the heat extraction zone is shown in FIG. 4. In
20 this configuration, a centrifuge is used to allow a separate, mechanically-driven density fractionation system to operate. In this configuration, a segment 51 of the column is made mobile and capable of rotary movement. The mobile, rotary centrifuge column segment is carried by bearings 53 at the base 55 and at intervals along its height to keep it in vertical alignment with the entirety of the column, and to allow it to rotate with respect to the portions 57,
25 59 of the column above and below it. This section is motor-driven, using a hydraulic system 61 driven from the surface. Vanes 63 within the centrifuge section will cause the water column to rotate, which vanes are designed based on turbine vane design to cause the hydrate-residual water in the section to rotate without turbulence and with increasing velocity toward the top of the section where residual water is extracted. Gravity "settling" or fractionation works here in a
30 horizontal plane, where the heavier residual water "settles" toward the sides of the column while the lighter, more buoyant hydrate "settles" toward the center of the column. The hydrate continues to rise buoyantly and concentrates in the center of the centrifuge section. It will be appreciated that more than one such centrifuge section may be employed.

[0057] As the hydrate rises into the upper, dissociation and heat exchange region 50 of the desalination fractionation column, the depth-related pressures which forced or drove formation of the hydrate dissipate; accordingly, the hydrate, which is substantially in the form of a slurry, will be driven to dissociate back into the hydrate-forming gas (or mixture of gases) and and 5 fresh water. However, regardless of the particular method used to extract the warmed residual seawater, heat energy in the surrounding seawater which ordinarily (*i.e.*, in the prior art) would be absorbed by the hydrate as it dissociates is no longer available to the hydrate. Therefore, because heat has been removed from the system by extracting warmed residual seawater in the heat extraction portion 44 of the apparatus, a net or overall cooling bias is created in the upper, 10 dissociation and heat exchange portion 50 of the installation.

[0058] This cooling bias is capitalized upon to significant advantage. In particular, as indicated schematically in Fig. 2, water being pumped into the system (at 32) is passed in heat exchanging relationship through the regions of dissociating hydrate. For example, it is contemplated that the dissociation and heat exchange portion 50 may be constructed as one or 15 more large, individual enclosures on the order of one hundred meters across. The input water will pass via a series of conduits through the regions of dissociating hydrate and will be cooled significantly as it does so. In fact, although some initial refrigeration will be required at start-up of the process, which initial refrigeration may be provided by heat exchange means 52, the installation eventually will attain a steady-state condition in which the amount of heat energy 20 transferred from the input water to the dissociating hydrate is sufficient to cool the input water to temperatures appropriate for spontaneous formation of hydrate at the particular depth of the dissociation column.

[0059] Ideally, the input water is stabilized at 4°C or below. This is because below that temperature, the density of the water increases, which enhances separation of the hydrate-water 25 slurry formed by injections of the gas. Additionally, at a given pressure, hydrate nucleation proceeds faster at colder water temperatures. During the start-up period, the system is run in a mode of maximum warm fluid extraction (to create a state of induced thermal bias) before equilibrium or steady-state is reached; although the duration of this start-up period will vary depending on the particular installation parameters, the design goal is that once steady-state is 30 reached, the system can be run for extremely long operating periods without being shut down, *i.e.*, periods on the order of years. Controlling residue water extraction, and thus heat removal, maintains a steady-state condition so that the apparatus does not keep cooling to below steady-state operating conditions.

[0060] Once the hydrate has dissociated into its constituent fresh water and gas or gases, the fresh water is pumped off, e.g. as at 54, and the gas is captured and recycled. (Provisions may be made for liquefying certain gases where this is desired.) Additionally, a portion of the water in the dissociation and heat exchange region 50 will be "gray water," which is fresh water 5 containing some small portion of salts that have been removed from the hydrate by washing of the hydrate with water. The distinction between the "gray" or mixed water and pure fresh water is indicated schematically by dashed line 56. The gray water may be suitable for drinking, depending on the salt concentration, or for agricultural or industrial use without further processing. The cold, gray water may be recycled back into the fractionation column, either by 10 pumping it back down to the hydrate formation section 34, as indicated at 58; or it may be injected back into the concentrated hydrate slurry at a region of the fractionation column located above the heat extraction portion 44, as indicated at 60, to increase the fluid nature of the hydrate slurry and to aid in controlling overall thermal balance of the system. Furthermore, providing gray water at 62 to dilute residual interstitial fluid allows for pre-dissociation washing.

15 [0061] As further shown in FIG. 1, in the post-processing and downstream usage section 14, the fresh water preferably is treated by secondary treatment means 64. The secondary treatment means may include, for example, fine filtering, gas extraction, aeration, and other processing required to bring the water to drinking water standard.

20 [0062] Moreover, it is extremely significant that depending on operating parameters such as temperature of the source water, the amount of residual seawater extracted in the heat extraction section 44, dimensions of the installation, and other parameters such as viscosities of fluids within the system; buoyancy of the hydrate relative to all fluids within the system; salinity and temperature of residual water; the design output requirements of fresh water; salinity and temperature of input water; design cooling requirements; system inefficiencies affecting thermal 25 balance; etc., the fresh water produced will be significantly cooled. This cooled water can be used to absorb heat from other applications or locations such as the insides of buildings, and hence can be used to provide refrigeration or provide for air-conditioning.

30 [0063] Finally, once the seawater has been cycled through the desalination fractionation column and downstream processing applications a desired number of times, the residual, concentrated seawater (which may be highly saline in nature) is simply pumped back to sea. Alternatively, it may be retained for those who desire it.

[0064] With respect to overall design, engineering, and construction considerations for the system, it is contemplated that the desalination fractionation column 130 will be on the order

of 15 to 20 meters in diameter, or even larger. Conventional excavation and shaft-lining methodologies common to the mining and tunneling industry can be used in the construction of the column 130. Overall dimensions will be determined based on the total desired fresh water production desired and relevant thermodynamic considerations. For example, one cubic meter of 5 methane hydrate has the capacity to warm about 90 to 100 cubic meters of water by about 1°C as it forms, and that same cubic meter of hydrate has the capacity to cool about 90 to 100 cubic meters of water by about 1°C as it dissociates. (Mixes of suitable gases have higher heats of 10 fusion, which makes the process more efficient.) Required cooling therefore will, in part, determine hydrate production rates, and hence dimensions of the system and the choice of gas or 15 gases to meet those production rates.

[0065] Preferably, the diameter of the residual fluid removal column segment is larger. This facilitates buoyant, upward movement of the hydrate through the water column while first allowing separation of residue water from the hydrate in the heat extraction region 44, and then dissociation and heat exchange in the dissociation and heat exchange region 50.

[0066] The dissociation and heat exchange region 50 may be constituted not just by a single dissociation "pool," as shown schematically in FIG. 2, but rather may consist of a number of linked, heat-exchanging devices in a number of different water treatment ponds or pools. The actual depth, size, throughput, etc. will depend on the production rate, which will depend, in turn, on the temperature of the input water, the particular gas or gas mixture used to form the hydrate, the rate at which heat can be removed from the system, etc.

[0067] The input of water into the base of the fractionation column can be controlled by a device (not shown) that alters the input throat diameter so as to facilitate mixing of the gas and water, thereby promoting more rapid and complete hydrate formation. Alternatively or additionally, hydrate formation can be enhanced by creating flow turbulence in the input water, 25 just below or within the base of the hydrate forming gas injection port 36. It may further be desirable to vary the diameter of the desalination fraction column in a manner to slow the buoyant descent of the hydrate slurry, thereby enhancing hydrate formation.

[0068] The dissociation and heat exchange region 50 will be significantly wider and larger than the lower portions of the desalination column. This is because hydrate will be floating up into it and dissociating into gas and fresh water at a rate that is faster than that which could be accommodated in a pool that is the diameter of the column itself. Moreover, the requirement for heat will be great; if sufficient heat cannot be provided, water ice will form and disrupt the desalination process. Provision for physical constriction within a column will hold

hydrate below the level where it dissociates freely, thus providing for a control on the amount of gas arriving at the surface. This is done for both normal operational and safety reasons.

[0069] Because the positively buoyant hydrate used in this embodiment of the invention floats, fresh water tends to be produced at the top of the section, thereby minimizing mixing of 5 fresh and saline water. To inhibit unwanted dissociation, the heat exchanger apparatus may extend downward to the top of the residual water removal section. The dissociation and heat exchange pools do not need to be centered over the water column; moreover, more than one desalination fractionation column may feed upward into a given dissociation and heat exchange pool. Similarly, groups of desalination fraction columns can be located close together so as to be 10 supported by common primary and secondary water treatment facilities, thereby decreasing installation costs and increasing economy.

[0070] In addition to large-scale installations, relatively small-scale installations are also possible. For these installations, smaller diameter desalination columns can be constructed in 15 locations where lower volumes of fresh water are required. Although overall efficiency of such systems will be lower than larger scale systems, the primary advantage of such small-scale installations is that they can be implemented using standard drilling methods. Furthermore, mass-produced, prefabricated desalination apparatus sections can be installed in the casings of drilled holes; this allows the installation to be completed in a relatively short period of time. Capital cost of such an installation also is reduced, as fabrication of the components can be 20 carried out on an industrialized basis using mass production techniques. The various operating sections of a smaller-scale installation might be replaced by extracting them from their casing using conventional drilling and pipeline maintenance techniques.

[0071] An alternate, slightly simplified embodiment 230 of a desalination fractionation column according to the invention is shown in FIG. 5. In this embodiment, hydrate formation 25 occurs essentially within a thermal equilibration column 132. The thermal equilibration column 132 has an open lower end 134 and is suspended in shaft 136. In this embodiment, input water is injected near the base of the desalination column 132, e.g., as at 138, preferably after passing through heat exchange and dissociation region 150 of the column 230 in similar fashion to the embodiment shown in FIG. 2. Positively buoyant hydrate-forming gas is injected into the lower 30 portions of the thermal equilibration column 132, as at 140, and hydrate will form and rise within the column 132 much as in the previous embodiment.

[0072] The embodiment 230 is simplified in that heat of formation of the hydrate is transferred to water surrounding the thermal equilibration column 132 within a "water jacket"

defined between the walls of the column 132 and the shaft 136 in which the desalination fractionation column is constructed. To this end, the hydrate formation conduit preferably is made from fabricated (i.e., "sewn") artificial fiber material, which is ideal because of its light weight and its potential for being used in an open weave that greatly facilitates thermal

5 equilibration between residual saline water within the thermal equilibration column 132 and seawater circulating within the water jacket.

[0073] As is the case with the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, warmed water is pumped out of the system, this warmed water being water which has circulated within the water jacket. In contrast to the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, however, the intent of removing warmed water

10 from the water jacket is not to remove so much heat energy that the input water is automatically cooled to temperatures suitable for formation of the hydrate at the base of the column, but rather it is simply to remove enough heat energy to prevent water within the interior of the hydrate formation conduit from becoming so warm that hydrate cannot form at all. Accordingly, the rate at which warm water is removed from the water jacket may be relatively small compared to the

15 rate at which warm water is removed from the heat extraction portion 44 of the embodiment shown in FIG. 2. As a result, it is necessary to supplement the cooling which takes place in the heat exchange and dissociation region 150 using supplemental "artificial" refrigeration means 152. Operation is otherwise similar to that of the embodiment shown in FIG. 2: fresh water is extracted from the upper portions of the heat exchange and dissociation portion 150; "gray water"

20 is extracted from lower portions of the heat exchange and dissociation region 150, i.e., from below the line of separation 156; and concentrated brine is removed from brine sump 141.

[0074] To facilitate "settling out" of brine which is sufficiently dense to be negatively buoyant due to concentration and/or cooling, and to facilitate heat transfer and thermal equilibration, the equilibration column 132 preferably is constructed with overlapping joints, as

25 shown in FIG. 6. This configuration permits the buoyant hydrate to rise throughout the column, while cooled, more saline water can flow out through the vents 142, as indicated schematically.

[0075] The desalination fractionation column installation may be further simplified by feeding the input water into the system without passing it through the dissociation section 250 of the embodiment 330 shown in FIG. 7. If the input water is not sufficiently cold, more artificial

30 refrigeration will need to be provided by refrigeration means 252, but operation is otherwise the same as embodiment 230 shown in FIG. 5.

[0076] Whereas the embodiments described so far utilize gas or mixtures of gas which form positively buoyant hydrates under appropriate temperature and pressure conditions, the

versatility of hydrate-based desalination or purification can be expanded greatly by adapting the methods and apparatus described above to accommodate negatively buoyant hydrates. An embodiment 430 of a desalination fractionation "column" configured to permit the use of negatively buoyant hydrate for water purification is shown in FIGS. 8-10. The major difference 5 between this embodiment 430 and the preceding embodiments of desalination fractionation columns is that the heat exchange and dissociation portion 350 of the installation is laterally or horizontally displaced or offset relative to the hydrate formation and heat removal sections 336 and 346, respectively. The hydrate formation and heat removal sections are similar to those in the embodiments described above.

10 [0077] A number of different operating gases can be employed with this configuration. Low molecular weight gases such as O₂, N₂, H₂S, Ar, Kr, Xe, CH₄, and CO₂ can all form hydrates under different pressure-temperature conditions. Each of the different hydrate-forming gas systems will require special design of the hydrate column which is tailored to the particular gas used in the installation, but the principles of hydrate formation to extract fresh water will remain 15 the same. Additionally, adding small amounts of additive gas(es) to the primary hydrate-forming gas may broaden the hydrate stability field in the same way the methane hydrate stability field is expanded by mixing higher density hydrocarbon gases with methane.

20 [0078] Although a number of different gases that form negatively buoyant hydrate may be used for hydrate desalination, carbon dioxide and the desalination column in which it is used are described herein to illustrate the design requirements and considerations for a desalination system employing hydrate that is naturally less buoyant than seawater. Carbon dioxide (or gas mixtures containing predominantly carbon dioxide, referred to herein simply as "carbon dioxide" for simplicity) is an ideal gas to use for a number of reasons. In particular, carbon dioxide does not combust under the physical and thermal conditions encountered in the hydrate desalination 25 apparatus, and is thus virtually hazard-free. Carbon dioxide hydrate is stable at shallower depths than methane hydrate (and about the same as mixed gas methane hydrate). Even if present dissolved in relatively high concentrations, carbon dioxide is safe for human consumption and is not offensive to either taste or smell (as would be the case of H₂S hydrate). (In fact, fresh water produced using carbon dioxide can be made so as to retain some quantity of the carbon dioxide, 30 thereby providing soda water that is similar to many popular brands but that is different in at least one significant way in that it will contain all the naturally occurring minerals found in seawater in proportion to the remaining salts not removed during the desalination process.) Carbon dioxide hydrate is, like methane, tasteless and odorless. There is considerable recent experimental

information which demonstrate clearly the actual marine behavior of the formation and behavior of carbon dioxide hydrate. Carbon dioxide is very common and can be produced locally almost anywhere and is also commonly available as an industrial waste product -- particularly in the exhaust gases produced when burning fossil fuel. (A further advantage of using carbon dioxide as compared to methane or methane mixes is that the higher heat of fusion of carbon dioxide hydrate will heat the residual water more quickly than methane or methane-mixed gases; thus, the induced thermal bias will be higher and the system will operate more efficiently.)

[0079] Design and engineering of the desalination fractionation column will be determined in large measure based on the phase properties of the particular gas being used.

10 FIG. 11 shows, for example, the carbon dioxide hydrate stability regions superimposed over the carbon dioxide phase diagram. The shaded portion of the diagram indicates that carbon dioxide hydrate (formed from carbon dioxide gas) is stable at from an upper pressure limit of about 18 atmospheres, just above 0°C, to about 40 atmospheres pressure at just above about 8°C. With respect to carbon dioxide, *per se*, the liquidus extends from about 37 atmospheres pressure at just 15 above 0°C, to about 40 atmospheres pressure at just above 8°C. Above the liquidus, carbon dioxide exists as a gas; below the liquidus, carbon dioxide spontaneously compresses to a liquid.

[0080] Accordingly, the system is constructed so that, assuming carbon dioxide is used as the operating gas, the carbon dioxide is injected into the hydrate formation portion of the column at ambient temperature and pressure that is within the operating region 450 that consists of the 20 portion of the carbon dioxide hydrate stability zone that lies above the carbon dioxide liquidus and above the freezing point of water. The practical result of this arrangement is that the range of water depths at which carbon dioxide may be used as the operating gas is relatively small and is comparatively shallow. Accordingly, a relatively shallow land apparatus can be constructed, which will reduce construction complexity and cost.

25 [0081] Similar to the embodiments described above, carbon dioxide (or other negatively buoyant hydrate-forming gas, as desired) is injected near the base of the hydrate formation section 336 (e.g., at 352) and mixed with supply or input seawater that has been chilled by being passed through the heat exchange and dissociation portion 350 and/or by "artificial" refrigeration, as at 354. The carbon dioxide hydrate will float only if the formation of the hydrate is 30 incomplete such that a complex, hydrate-gas meshwork is formed. This condition is met when the gas is injected rapidly and in relatively large bubbles. The carbon dioxide hydrate isolates carbon dioxide gas bubbles from the surrounding seawater, thereby preventing further formation of hydrate. The combined gas/liquid carbon dioxide and hydrate is positively buoyant, even

though the hydrate *per se* is negatively buoyant (*i.e.*, has a greater specific gravity than the seawater), and floats upward, as at 356. Additionally, some of the bubbles will burst and new hydrate shells will be formed; hydrate shells with gas bubbles predominantly form new carbon dioxide hydrate rims, which are assisted upward by carbon dioxide gas which tends to adhere to 5 solid hydrate particles.

[0082] The system is designed to produce as much hydrate as possible, consistent with leaving enough warm, lower-density, residual fluid to form a "flux" and to allow extraction of heat by removing the residual seawater in the heat extraction section 346. The system furthermore has the capacity for very rapid liquid or gas injection, which may be in time-10 sequence bursts rather than being continuous. It is intended that not all gas form hydrate, as noted above, to ensure incomplete formation of hydrate. Thus, larger quantities of gas are required for a negatively buoyant hydrate-based system than for a complete hydrate-forming gas system such as the positively buoyant hydrate-based systems described above.

[0083] As in the case of positively buoyant hydrate-based embodiments, formation of the 15 negatively buoyant (assisted buoyancy) hydrate is exothermic. Accordingly, heat which is given off during hydrate formation warms the surrounding, residual seawater, which makes the residual seawater more buoyant than the chilled seawater which is being input into the lower part of the column. The residual seawater therefore moves buoyantly upward along with the hydrate as new, denser input water is supplied to the base of the fractionation column, as at 360.

[0084] The upward movement of the surrounding residual seawater, along with the 20 original upward movement of the assisted buoyancy hydrate, has a certain momentum associated with it. This carries the hydrate upward through the column until it reaches a lateral deflection zone 362, where the hydrate/residual seawater slurry is diverted horizontally or laterally relative to the hydrate formation and heat removal sections 336 and 346 and into the dissociation and 25 heat removal section 350. Thus, even though some of the hydrate "bubbles" will burst or crack, thereby releasing the carbon dioxide gas contained therein and losing buoyancy, the hydrate in large measure continue to move upward and over into the heat exchange and dissociation region of the column 350 due to this momentum. As the hydrate loses momentum within the heat exchange and dissociation portion 350, it will settle and dissociate into the gas and fresh water, 30 which will separate from residual seawater as described in greater detail below.

[0085] Some of the hydrate, however, will form solid masses without entrapped gas and will sink to the lowermost, sump portion 364 of the column. Concentrated brine will also sink to and settle in the sump portion 364. The sunken hydrate and concentrated residual brine are

pumped out of the sump at 365 and separated by appropriately configured separation means 366. The waste saline water 368 is disposed of as appropriate, and a slurry consisting of the sunken hydrate is pumped upwardly as indicated at 370 and is discharged into the heat exchange and dissociation chamber 350, e.g. at 372, where the hydrate dissociates into gas and fresh water.

5 [0086] Within the dissociation and heat exchange chamber 350, the hydrate, whether delivered or transported to the chamber via the lateral deflection portion 362 of the column or pumped from the sump of the desalination fractionation column 364, will dissociate into fresh water and the hydrate-forming gas.

10 [0087] To facilitate separation of fresh water from saline water, it is necessary to promote transfer of as much hydrate to the upper part of the dissociation and heat exchange chamber 350 as possible; to hold hydrate as high in the dissociation and heat exchange chamber 350 as possible until dissociation of that volume of hydrate is complete; and to keep mixing of the fresh water produced by dissociation and the more saline residual water to a minimum. The configuration of the dissociation and heat exchange chamber shown in FIGS. 9 and 10 facilitates 15 these objectives.

20 [0088] In particular, the assisted buoyancy hydrate slurry rising through the desalination fractionation column enters the chamber as at 360 after being diverted laterally at deflection portion 362, as indicated schematically in FIG. 9. Additionally, hydrate slurry being pumped from the sump is injected into the dissociation chamber at 372, where it may be placed within special fluid separation devices. The dissociation and heat exchange chamber is constructed with a number of canted separator shelves 380 which extend from one end of the chamber to the other, as well as from one side of the chamber to the other. The canted nature of the shelves allows the denser saline water to sink and the lighter fresh water to rise within and between the shelves, thereby minimizing turbidity and mixing of saline and fresh water. The separator shelves 380 are 25 canted in that they slope downward, both from one end of the chamber to the other as well as from one side of the chamber to the other. The separator shelves have pass-through apertures 382 which allow the denser, saline water to sink within the system and the less dense, fresh water to rise within the system to the top of the chamber as the hydrate dissociates into the fresh water and gas.

30 [0089] Fresh water, which is cooled due to the cooling bias created by the removal of warm residual water as described above in connection with the positively buoyant hydrate embodiments, is removed as at 384 and may be used for cooling as well as for potable water. "Gray" water and saline residue are removed from lower portions of the heat exchange and

dissociation chamber 350, as at 386 and 388, and are handled as described above in the context of the positively buoyant hydrate embodiments, *e.g.*, gray water may be used for drinking or industrial applications and the saline residue may be recycled back as input into the base of the desalination fractionation column.

5 [0090] As an alternative to gaseous carbon dioxide, liquid carbon dioxide can be used to form assisted buoyancy hydrate. At the relatively shallow depths appropriate to the formation of hydrate for separation of fresh water, liquid carbon dioxide is more buoyant than seawater (although not as buoyant as gaseous carbon dioxide.) By injecting liquid carbon dioxide energetically into seawater, a resultant meshwork of hydrate and liquid carbon dioxide is formed
10 which is positively buoyant. The meshwork mass will rise spontaneously as a whole immediately upon forming and will behave essentially the same as a hydrate meshwork formed from gaseous carbon dioxide and carbon dioxide hydrate.

15 [0091] (Advantages of liquid carbon dioxide over gaseous carbon dioxide stem from the fact that once the carbon dioxide is compressed, it can be transported to deeper depths without further compression. Thus, injecting liquid carbon dioxide at depths of five hundred meters or more -- well below the liquidus -- is possible without the need for deep, in-line pumps. Moreover, deeper (*i.e.*, higher pressure) injection of liquid carbon dioxide will promote very rapid crystallization and growth of the hydrate crystals.)

20 [0092] When liquid carbon dioxide is used to form assisted buoyancy hydrate, dissociation is comparatively violent because the unhydrated liquid carbon dioxide trapped within the meshwork produces large volumes of carbon dioxide gas when the mixture rises above the liquidus. Thus, in addition to the carbon dioxide gas released by dissociation of the hydrate (which occurs above the carbon dioxide liquidus), the extra gas produced by conversion of the liquid carbon dioxide to gaseous carbon dioxide has the potential to cause significant turbulence
25 and mixing. Therefore, flow of the hydrate should be controlled such that it enters the dissociation section while still within the hydrate stability field in order to preclude significant dissociation while residual interstitial saline water remains in the slurry.

30 [0093] Additionally, where carbon dioxide liquid is used to form assisted buoyancy hydrate, care should be taken to allow residual fluid to alter its state to gas once the hydrate has risen above the liquidus pressure depth, but while the hydrate remains stable. This will reduce turbulence and mixing when the hydrate finally dissociates.

[0094] Ideally, residual saline water should be replaced by fresh water before the hydrate rises into the gas-stable zone and then the dissociation area of the carbon dioxide hydrate phase

diagram (FIG. 11). This can be accomplished using multiple water injection points alternatingly arranged between multiple residual or interstitial water removal sections, as illustrated in

FIG. 12. In other words, the fluid removal section 44 (Fig 2) is constructed as an alternating sequence of fresh water injection subsections 412 and fluid removal subsections 414 constructed as shown in either FIG. 3 or FIG. 4. The benefits of removing the interstitial saline fluid include additional heat removal; washing of the slurry (*i.e.*, removal of pollutants or adhering ions or particulate material from the surface of the hydrate crystals) by fluid replacement; and direct removal of saline interstitial water from the hydrate slurry and dilution or replacement of the original saline interstitial fluid produced by the process of hydrate formation.

10 [0095] Although washing of interstitial water is strongly recommended for the slurry mixture of liquid carbon dioxide and carbon dioxide hydrate -- as well as for any hydrate being used for water purification, where possible -- so as to minimize turbulence and mixing attributable to the liquid carbon dioxide converting to gaseous carbon dioxide, washing the slurry and flushing saline interstitial fluid therefrom would also provide benefits for any positively 15 buoyant hydrate-based or assisted buoyancy hydrate-based system. In particular, injecting cold water (either fresh or gray) from the dissociation section into the hydrate slurry will remove additional heat from the hydrate at the same time that saline interstitial water is flushed from the hydrate slurry. Moreover, multiple residual water flushings will ensure greater fresh water production.

20 [0096] Another embodiment 530 of a desalination fractionation "column" which is configured to utilize negatively buoyant hydrate and which facilitates separation of the hydrate and residual seawater is illustrated in FIGS. 13 and 14. The "column" is configured as an asymmetric, U-shaped installation, which consists primarily of a seawater input conduit 432, a hydrate formation and catch sump region 434, and a residue fluid riser conduit 436. As in 25 previous embodiments, the seawater input conduit passes through a dissociation and heat exchange region 438 which, in this embodiment, is configured especially as a hydrate "catch basin." As in the previous embodiments, the input water is passed through the dissociation/heat exchange catch basin 438 in heat exchanging relationship with dissociating hydrate in order to chill the input seawater.

30 [0097] The input seawater is pumped to the base 440 of the column, where it turns and flows upward and laterally through elbow portion 442 before entering the hydrate formation and catch sump 434. Negatively buoyant hydrate-forming liquid or gas is injected into the input seawater in the hydrate formation and catch sump at 444. (Means 945 for liquefying certain

gases are provided; residual fluid can be used in a heat exchanger 457 to provide cooling for the liquefaction process.) Injection of the gas or liquid is controlled such that hydrate formation is complete (in contrast to incomplete, as in the case of the previously described, assisted buoyancy embodiment), *i.e.*, such that all gas is utilized to form hydrate. The negatively buoyant hydrate 5 settles to the bottom of the catch sump 434. As the hydrate settles, it displaces the residual seawater, which is warmed by the heat liberated during hydrate formation. The residual seawater therefore rises buoyantly through residue fluid riser conduit 436, and it is pumped out of the system to remove heat and create a cooling bias in the system as in the previously described embodiments.

10 [0098] The rate of formation and settling of the hydrate is controlled such that it "packs" down to the point of being grain supported. Mechanical apparatus such as a vibration tray is located on the sloping floor 439 of the settling portion of the hydrate-residual fluid chamber 434. This concentrates the hydrate and minimizes residual fluid remaining so that the hydrate can be pumped rapidly, as a slurry, from the base of the sump up into the dissociation/heat exchange 15 catch basin 438 via slurry pumping conduit 446. The hydrate slurry is pumped to the dissociation/heat exchange catch basin 438 at a rate that is generally faster than the rate at which positively buoyant hydrates rises in the previously described embodiments. Decreasing the time required to transfer the hydrate from the formation region (where it is at its maximum stability) to the dissociation region (where it is at its minimum stability) ensures that a greater proportion of 20 the hydrate will dissociate relatively high in the catch basin. This reduces the amount of mixing of fresh and residue water and increases the relative proportion of fresh water that can be recovered.

25 [0099] Pumped hydrate slurry arrives in the dissociation/heat exchange basin in a concentrated form with little more than intergranular saline water present. Care is taken to allow the saline water to separate downward and fresh water upward so that there is a minimum of mixing. This is achieved by placing a slurry holder and fluid separator tank in the upper part of the dissociation/heat exchange chamber 438. This allows the negative buoyancy hydrate 30 dissociation to take place so that saline water is delivered to and collects in the lower part of the dissociation chamber 438, in which the slurry holder and fluid separator tank is placed, without mixing with fresh water.

[0100] A preferred slurry holder and fluid separator consists of a fixed, wide-mouthed, upwardly open tank or tanks 450 (FIG. 14) that receive the hydrate slurry from above. Each tank holds the negatively buoyant hydrate from the hydrate slurry transfer system 446 and

prevents it from sinking toward the base of the dissociation chamber 438. The hydrate slurry is delivered by pipes 448 to a number of hydrate spreaders consisting of vanes or rotating vanes designed to disperse the granular hydrate 468. The negatively buoyant hydrate separates while falling to a screen shelf 470 in the tank. This allows saline water to sink through the screen shelf 5 at the base of the circulating input water intercooler system 474, which transfers heat from the input water to the dissociating hydrate and feeds the cooled water downward to be treated.

[0101] A number of residual water delivery pipes 475 extend downward from the base of this slurry holding tank, which allows heavier saline water to flow to the base of the vessel without disturbing the water surrounding these pipes. Thus, even when the fresh water-saline 10 water interface is located in the vessel below the slurry holding tank, no mixing occurs between the residue water purged from each input of hydrate slurry because of a physical separation. The main interface 477 (dashed line) between fresh and saline water will be located somewhere the lower part of the dissociation/heat exchange chamber 438, where saline water naturally collects below fresh due to density differences. Saline water is removed at the base of the chamber 480, 15 and provision is also made for gray water removal as at 482.

[0102] Multiple slurry holding tanks may be placed within a given dissociation/heat exchange chamber so that the flow of hydrate slurry can be rapid enough to prevent clogging or freezing up of any one tank. Circulating input water may be passed first through one slurry holding tank and then through another to minimize temperature of the input water as it exits the 20 dissociation/heat exchange chamber.

[0103] All fluids will find their relative positions according to natural buoyancy or through a process of fractionation. All internal piping in the vessel can be fabricated from inexpensive plastic or other material. This method of fluid separation may also be installed in the dissociation/heat exchange section of the assisted buoyancy and pumped sump embodiment 25 shown in Fig. 8.

[0104] Preferably, the slurry pumping conduit 446 is constructed as a variable volume pipe, in order to permit periodic pumping of hydrate without allowing the hydrate to settle or move upward slowly. Such a variable volume pipe can be fabricated relatively easily by inserting a flexible sleeve within the slurry pumping conduit 446 around which fluid can flood 30 when the pressure within the liner is reduced.

[0105] The injection point 444 of the hydrate-forming liquid or gas, it will be noted, is positioned above the base of the column 440 so that in the event of incomplete hydrate formation (which would result in the formation of assisted buoyancy hydrate), any excess gas which does

not form hydrate (along with assisted buoyancy hydrate) will rise up the residue fluid riser conduit 436. (Very little hydrate will escape with gas up the residue fluid riser conduit 436, and any such hydrate will have dissociated prior to arriving at the top of the residue riser section. Therefore, the amount of fresh water "lost" by being transported by such hydrate will be minimal; 5 recovery of that fresh water is not feasible; and accordingly no connection is provided between the output of the residue fluid riser conduit 436 and the dissociation/heat exchange catch basin 438.)

[0106] For proper operation of this embodiment, flow rate controls such as constrictors should be used to keep the rate of flow of fluid through the system low enough to keep solid 10 hydrate from being swept up the residue fluid riser conduit 436. Furthermore, the design of the hydrate formation and catch sump 434, as well as the lower portion of the residue fluid riser conduit, should be designed to facilitate "clean" separation of the hydrate from the residue fluid. Accordingly, the hydrate formation and catch sump 434 is designed to impart lateral movement to the residue fluid as well as to permit upward movement thereof. This causes the 15 hydrate/residue fluid mixture to move initially with a relatively small upward component, which facilitates settling out of the hydrate and which is in contrast to the previously described embodiments, which provide more vertically oriented fluid movement that is comparatively turbid and which have poorer settling and separation characteristics.

[0107] In the embodiments described thus far, the weight of the column of water creates 20 the pressures required for hydrate formation. In these embodiments, the minimum pressure depth at which hydrate is stable is far greater than at sea level, where the pressure is one atmosphere. Accordingly, the hydrate begins to dissociate at relatively elevated pressures.

[0108] Various ones of the embodiments described above may be modified so as to collect the fresh water released from the hydrate and to capture the released gas at the region of 25 the fractionation column where the dissociation takes place, rather than at the top of the column (surface level; one atmosphere ambient pressure), with certain resultant advantages. In particular, relatively large volumes of hydrate-forming gases and gas mixtures are required to desalinate large volumes of water. Therefore, if the gas is captured, processed for re-injection, and stored while maintained at elevated pressures (e.g., the pressure at which the hydrate begins 30 to dissociate), the volume of gas that must be handled will be much smaller than would be the case if the gas were allowed to expand fully as it rises to the surface and pressure drops to atmospheric. Additionally, if the hydrate-forming gas is kept pressurized, raising its pressure to

the pressure required for injection in the hydrate-forming section requires far less recompression of the gas and hence is less costly.

[0109] A preferred embodiment 600 in which dissociation and gas capture and processing are controlled so as to be kept at elevated pressure is illustrated in FIG. 15. In this embodiment, 5 a physical barrier 610 extends across the fractionation column and blocks the upward movement of the hydrate slurry. The location of the barrier 610 depends on the stability limits of the particular hydrate-forming substance used, but will be above the region of hydrate stability (i.e., at lesser pressure-depth). As the hydrate dissociates, the released gas forms a pocket at trap 620 and enters a gas recovery and processing system 626 while still at a pressure depth considerably 10 greater than one atmosphere surface pressure. (The gas processing system 626 may contain means for liquefying certain gases.) The gas is processed and re-injected into the hydrate formation section 628 at 629 in the same manner as in the previously described embodiments, except the gas system is maintained at considerably higher pressure.

[0110] The hydrate dissociation section 630 extends downward to some particular depth 15 determined by the particular hydrate-forming gas being used. Because the hydrate dissociates under "controlled," elevated pressure, the dissociation reaction will proceed generally more slowly than in the above-described embodiments. Therefore, the heat exchanger 632 present in the dissociation/heat exchanger section (as described in connection with previous embodiments) is designed to accommodate the particular, slower reaction rates. Input water 634 is passed 20 through the dissociation/heat exchange section in heat exchanger 632 and is injected into the base of the desalination fractionation column at 636, as in previously described embodiments.

[0111] One or more fresh water bypass pipes 640 communicate with the dissociation region at a point 641 located above the fresh water/saline water interface 644 but below the upper boundary 648 of the hydrate stability field. The pipe(s) 640, which are screened or otherwise 25 configured to prevent hydrate from entering them, deliver fresh water released from the hydrate to fresh water accumulation region 666. A gray water return pipe 650 allows denser, more saline gray water to flow back down into the saline fluid below the fresh water/saline water interface 644. More highly saline residual water and/or negatively buoyant hydrate is drawn from the sump 654 and processed or removed as at 658, as in previously described embodiments. Output 30 fresh water, some of which may be returned to the fluid removal section for purposes of washing interstitial saline water as described above (not shown), is drawn off at 660, near the top of the fresh water accumulation region 666 and well above the physical barrier 610.

[0112] It is contemplated that the physical barrier 610, the fresh water and gray water return pipes 640, 650, and the heat exchanger in the dissociation/heat exchange section 630 may be configured such that their positions can be varied, thereby permitting different hydrate-forming liquids, gases, or gas mixtures to be used in the same installation. The physical barrier 5 610 and heat exchanger might be vertically adjustable, whereas a series of bypass and return pipes 640, 650 having different inlet locations can be provided and opened and closed remotely using suitable inlet and outlet valves. In this manner, changing from one hydrate-forming substance to another can be effected very quickly and conveniently.

[0113] By holding and fully processing for re-injection the hydrate-forming gas while it is 10 still under pressure, considerable economies of operation can be achieved. The variation in the pressure of the liquid or gas, from that required for formation of the hydrate down to that at which fresh water is released from the hydrate, can be kept to a minimum. This, in turn, minimizes the energy cost associated with pumping the captured hydrate-forming gas from above the dissociation/heat exchange section back down to the hydrate-forming section at the base of 15 the apparatus, particularly considering the fact that, percentagewise, the greatest change of pressure in a hydraulic column (such as any of the above-described embodiments) takes place in the upper portions of the column. Moreover, the volume of the gas to be handled (and accordingly the size of the gas handling equipment and facility) will also be reduced significantly.

[0114] As an alternative (not shown) to the configuration shown in FIG. 15, the upper 20 part of the desalination fractionation column can be sealed and pressurized by means of an associated hydraulic standpipe, thereby causing pressures within the apparatus near the surface to be equivalent to the pressure-height of the standpipe. Where the standpipe is implemented in tall structures (such as adjacent buildings near the desalination facility), relatively high pressures can 25 be created in the topmost part of the dissociation/heat exchange section, which is at ground level.

[0115] In further embodiments of the invention, the water may be desalinated or purified 30 in self-contained, mechanically pressurized vessels. Such embodiments offer a number of distinct advantages, including the fact that the installations can be of various sizes and shapes to suit local conditions, containment constraints, and fresh water requirements. Moreover, whereas the previously described embodiments are relatively large-scale and therefore are of a fixed, permanent nature, self-contained, pressurized embodiments can be more temporary in nature in terms of their construction and their location. Individual pressurized installations can occupy relatively small spaces and produce fresh water efficiently, even in low volumes. Such

installations can be fabricated at central manufacturing facilities and installed on site with a minimum of local site construction, which site might be a building or even a ship or other mobile platform.

[0116] A mechanically pressurized installation configured to use positively buoyant

- 5 hydrate to extract fresh water from water is illustrated in FIG. 16. Input water is pumped and pressurized from input pressure to the operating system pressure by pump 704. The water enters the pressurized hydrate formation and separation vessel 710 at water input 711, and a suitable, positively buoyant hydrate-forming substance is injected at injection point 712. (Means 713 for liquefying certain gases are provided where this is advantageous to the desalination process.)
- 10 Positively buoyant hydrate 714 spontaneously forms and rises through the residual water, as in previously described embodiments, to the top of the vessel 710 where it accumulates and concentrates.

[0117] The buoyant hydrate slurry is subsequently admitted into transfer and washing section 720, and then into the dissociation/heat exchange vessel 722. (Flow of the hydrate slurry is regulated by valves 734.) While in the transfer and washing section 720, the hydrate may be washed of the residual, intergranular saline fluid using fresh water 726 tapped from the fresh water output 728. More than one wash cycle may be used to completely flush residual fluid, although the number of washings will depend on the effectiveness of separation through fractionation (which may vary for different gases and gas mixtures) and the nature of the 20 crystalline fraction of the slurry. In some cases, no washing may be necessary.

[0118] Pressure is maintained in the hydrate formation and separation vessel 710 and in the dissociation/heat exchange vessel 722 by pressure balance reservoir systems 732 (one for each vessel), and movement of fluid from one vessel to the other is controlled by varying pressure and using the in-line valves 734. The systems 732 each have a pressure pump 733 and a 25 diaphragm or gas-fluid interface 736, which are used to raise and lower pressure in each vessel. Pressure in the vessels is controlled so that the hydrate remains stable as hydrate until it is finally collected and concentrated at the top of the dissociation vessel 722. This is because premature dissociation will release considerable amounts of gas and therefore will cause undesired mixing. Moreover, pressure conditions in the dissociation vessel should be controlled to minimize 30 turbulence in the fluid-gas mixture and to promote efficient separation of saline and fresh water.

[0119] The dissociation and heat exchange vessel 722 may be constituted by a number of linked, heat-exchanging devices in a number of different water treatment chambers. The actual size, throughput, etc. will depend on the overall system production rate which, in turn, will

depend on the temperature of the input water, the particular liquid, gas, or gas mixture used to form the hydrate, the rate at which heat can be removed from the system, etc. Fractionation, concentration, separation, drying, and re-use of the hydrate-forming gas takes place in the same manner as in the previously described embodiments. Additionally, heat produced by liquefying 5 hydrate-forming gas can be absorbed and removed using heat exchangers containing residue or saline fluids.

[0120] It will be appreciated that the mechanically pressurized process is inherently less continuous than the previously described embodiments and is essentially a batch process.

Pressure in the system is controlled so as to simulate the pressure variation in the previously 10 described embodiments: the water to be treated is pressurized and injected into the apparatus, and then pressure is raised and lowered to control the rate of the hydrate formation and dissociation reactions.

[0121] Mechanically pressurized embodiments provide increased versatility in that pressures may be controlled to provide the optimum pressures for formation of hydrate and to 15 control the rate of dissociation. Moreover, different liquids, gases, and gas mixtures can be used within the same apparatus, and the same water can be processed more than once using different liquids, gases, and gas mixtures.

[0122] A further mechanically pressurized embodiment 800, which embodiment utilizes negatively buoyant hydrate to extract fresh water from water to be treated, is shown in FIG. 17. 20 Input water is pumped from input pressure up to the operating system pressure and into the pressurized hydrate formation and separation vessel 810 by pumps 804, and a suitable, negatively buoyant hydrate-forming gas is injected at injection point 812. (Means 813 for liquefying certain gases may be provided.) Negatively buoyant hydrate 814 spontaneously forms and sinks through the residual water, as described in connection with previously described negatively buoyant 25 hydrate embodiments, and collects and concentrates in gated sump isolation sections 816, which are opened and closed to control passage of the hydrate therethrough.

[0123] As in the previously described mechanically pressurized embodiment, pressure is maintained in the system by pressure balance reservoir systems 832 (one for each vessel), and movement of the fluid can be controlled by varying the pressure in the system compartments. 30 Pressure pumps 830 and diaphragms or gas-fluid interfaces 836 are used to raise and lower pressure in each vessel independently.

[0124] As the hydrate slurry passes through the transfer and washing section 820 and into the dissociation/heat exchange vessel 822, it may be washed of the residual, intergranular saline

fluid with fresh water tapped from the fresh water output 828, which removes salt from the hydrate slurry prior to dissociation.

[0125] Subsequently, the hydrate is permitted to flow downward from the transfer and washing section 820, and into the hydrate dissociation and heat exchange vessel 822, where is 5 dissociates and fresh, gray, and saline water are removed. Heat exchange between the input water and the dissociating hydrate slurry occurs as described in previous embodiments.

Dissociation takes place under controlled pressure conditions to minimize turbulence in the fluid-gas mixture and to promote efficient separation of saline and fresh water.

[0126] Preferably, a slurry holder and fluid separator tank 860 is provided in the upper 10 part of the dissociation/heat exchange vessel 822 and is similar in construction to that described above and shown in FIGS. 13 and 14. The tank 860 minimizes mixing of fresh and saline water by providing a conduit for the residual saline water to sink to the bottom of the vessel, which conduit isolates the saline water from the lower density fresh water.

[0127] As in the case of the mechanically pressurized, positively buoyant hydrate 15 embodiment, the dissociation and heat exchange vessel 822 may be constituted by a number of linked, heat-exchanging devices in a number of different water treatment chambers. The actual size, throughput, etc. will depend on the production rate which, in turn, will depend on the temperature of the input water, the particular liquid, gas, or gas mixture used to form the hydrate, the rate at which heat can be removed from the system, etc. Fractionation, concentration, 20 separation, drying, and re-use of the hydrate-forming substance takes place in the same manner as in the previously described embodiments.

[0128] Another embodiment 900, which embodiment provides greater versatility by using either positively or negatively buoyant hydrate to extract fresh water from seawater or polluted water, is shown in FIG. 18. Pumps P and in-line valves 914 are provided throughout the system. 25 Operation, depending on the particular hydrate-forming substance used, is as described in the pressurized vessel installations using either positively or negatively buoyant gas hydrate.

[0129] This embodiment is particularly useful where the gas or gas mixture supply is 30 uncertain as a variety of gases may be used. Embodiments of this type could be useful in disaster relief or in expeditionary military activity, or at any place where a temporary supply of fresh water is required without a significant construction requirement. This embodiment contains all the attributes of both the positive and negative buoyancy hydrate, mechanically pressurized desalination fractionation embodiments, including use of fresh water 926 from the fresh water output 928 to flush residual saline water. Multiple liquid or gas injection points 908 are

provided, as well as provision for handling either positively or negatively buoyant hydrate. In particular, multiple pumping units P and fluid control valves 914 are provided to direct the flow of fluids and hydrate slurries in fluid control and washing units 916 and hydrate slurry control units 918. The gas processing system 944 includes means for liquefying certain recovered gases and gas mixtures.

5 [0130] As in the above-described embodiments in which the weight of the column of water generates the requisite pressures, any of the mechanically pressurized vessel installations may be simplified by feeding the input water into the system without passing it through the dissociation section for heat exchange. More artificial refrigeration will need to be provided, but 10 operation will otherwise be the same as for the positive and negative buoyancy hydrate embodiments shown in FIGS. 16 and 17 and the "combined" pressurized apparatus as shown in FIG. 18.

15 [0131] As noted above, mechanically pressurized embodiments of the invention may be extremely mobile. In the case of a ship-borne installation (FIG. 19), for example, water to be treated is processed as described in previous embodiments, but in a smaller and more compact 20 installation built right on board the ship 1000.

[0132] Negatively buoyant hydrate formed from a liquid or gas (such as carbon dioxide) that is non-combustible at the pressures and temperatures of this system and the surrounding ambient conditions is preferred, especially where installations are placed in ships or where the 25 handling of combustible gases constitutes a hazard.

25 [0133] In the ship-borne embodiment, some of the heat produced by the hydrate formation reaction is extracted by heat exchangers in the hydrate formation and concentration vessel, which is possible because of the immediate access to seawater. Further heat is extracted from the hydrate slurry in the hydrate slurry transfer system. This pre-dissociation heat extraction maximizes the cooling effect of the hydrate dissociation because removing heat in addition to that removed with the residual treated fluid allows dissociation to begin with the 30 hydrate slurry at a lower temperature than would exist otherwise. Thus, the fresh water produced will be significantly cooled. This cooled water can be used to absorb heat and hence can be used to provide refrigeration or air-conditioning. The fresh water is treated as described in previous embodiments, and warmed residual water may be used as a low-grade heat source (although it is more likely to be pumped back to the sea).

[0134] Installation aboard a ship is ideal for the mechanically pressurized hydrate fractionation method of desalination. This is because the residual treated water can be returned

to the sea immediately, thereby maximizing efficiency of the heat-removal process. The water intake for the desalination ideally would be placed as low on the keel 1010 of the ship as possible to separate intake and residual water return and to minimize uptake of pollutants, which in the case of oil-based products and many industrial chemicals either float or are usually found in increasing proportion closer to the sea surface.

[0135] Aboard ship, the return fluid can have multiple outlets 1020, which allows it to be returned to the sea closer to the surface where the warmer water will float well away from the water intake. In addition, movement of the ship creates considerable turbulence which will promote mixing of the residual water and near-surface water when the ship is under way. When 10 the ship is tied up, water from a shore source can be used or the system can be recycled with fresh water to minimize residual water return, and the desalination fractionation system can be operated at a minimal level, *i.e.*, at a level just sufficient for the thermal balance required for normal operation to be attained quickly. Where the ship is moored or otherwise maintaining a static position, the residual water can be returned to the sea directly. Wind and tide can be taken 15 into consideration to select the return outlet utilized so as to minimize environmental impact and allow the residual water to be carried away from the ship most efficiently.

[0136] Similar compact installations can be fabricated as pre-packaged components that can be airlifted or easily flown and trucked to a particular site -- for instance, immediately following a disaster such as an earthquake -- and assembled rapidly. Where temporary or mobile installations are operated, more compact versions of the intake, outfall, and gas processing apparatus similar to that described for FIG. 1 are employed. These can be specially designed for light weight, ease of deployability, and ability to operate in a variety of conditions. Power generating units or power cables suitable for drawing electricity from any inshore powerboat or other supply are also part of the mobile apparatus, and possibly also part of larger temporary facilities.

[0137] Pressurized vessel desalination fractionation installations can also be mounted on pallets for shipment in aircraft or ships or in standard commercial shipping containers (for which cargo handling equipment exists world-wide) to facilitate air and road travel. They can be mounted on vehicles or set up on a pier, or anywhere near seawater or other water to be desalinated or purified.

[0138] Finally, once the seawater has been cycled through the pressurized vessel desalination fractionation column and downstream processing applications a desired number of times, the residual seawater is simply pumped back to sea or retained for those who desire it.

[0139] As noted above, one reason carbon dioxide is an ideal gas to use for hydrate desalination or purification is that it is extremely common and, in fact, is typically found in industrial waste products -- particularly in the exhaust gases produced when burning fossil fuels.

(For the most part, the exhaust produced when burning fossil fuels typically contains water vapor, hydrogen sulfide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and nitrous oxides (NO_x) and nitrogen which passed through the combustion process in addition to soot and other particulate waste matter.

[0140] When using industrial exhaust as the source of carbon dioxide for desalinating or purifying water -- such purification may be the primary objective of the process, e.g., to produce potable water, or it may be simply a means for capturing carbon dioxide from the waste gas emissions for purposes of reducing "green house gases" and their associated environmental harm, with the production of fresh water being a "side" benefit -- certain provisions for pre-processing the gas must be made. In particular, an installation 1100 for simultaneously capturing carbon dioxide from industrial waste gases and producing desalinated or purified fresh water is illustrated in FIG. 20. Exhaust gas 1102 produced by the combustion of fossil fuels in industrial plant 1104 is fed through dry processing/ preprocessing means 1105. The raw exhaust gas is pretreated using filters, absorbents, electrostatic means, chemical sorption techniques, and/or catalysis to remove most of the non-carbon dioxide components. The exhaust gas must also be cooled substantially in order for the carbon dioxide hydrate to form, and the preprocessing means 1105 may include means 1106 for such cooling, e.g., heat exchangers through which the exhaust gas flows.

[0141] Before being introduced into hydrate formation vessel 1111, the exhaust gas passes through washing/hydrate-forming prechamber 1108. Prechamber 1108 may be a largely water-filled chamber that can be pressurized. When the prechamber 1108 is, in fact, so pressurized, the exhaust gas passes through the water in the chamber under pressure conditions sufficient to form hydrogen sulfide hydrate. As illustrated in FIG. 21, hydrogen sulfide hydrate will form at pressure/temperature conditions well above those required for carbon dioxide hydrate to form, and therefore the majority of the hydrogen sulfide components of the exhaust gas not removed in the previous, preliminary processing can be removed by forming hydrogen sulfide hydrates in the prechamber 1108 and then removing it, e.g., in a solid hydrate flush.

[0142] The washing residue from the exhaust gas will consist of solids formed from soot, partially combusted hydrocarbons, small amounts of metals and salts, and, when the prechamber 1108 is suitably pressurized and there is hydrogen sulfide in the exhaust gas, hydrogen sulfide

hydrate. (The solids will constitute only very small proportions of the exhaust gas.) When it is produced, the hydrogen sulfide hydrate subsequently will dissociate into hydrogen sulfide and water, with the attendant production of sulfuric acid and other hydrogen-oxygen-sulfur compounds, and along with the remaining solid waste will constitute hazardous material in concentrated form which needs to be disposed of using appropriate means that will be known to those having skill in the art.

5 [0143] The density of hydrogen sulfide hydrate, which has not been studied extensively, has been calculated to be 1.05 g/cc and has been measured at between 1.004 g/cc at 1 Mpa and 1.087 g/cc at 100 Mpa. Thus, its density is very close to that of fresh water. Therefore, if the 10 prechamber 1108 is filled with water, the hydrogen sulfide hydrate will not separate from the water in the prechamber 1108 by sinking, particularly when large volumes of gas are rising quickly through the prechamber. Under conditions of low turbidity with gas bubbles rising through the water bath, the hydrogen sulfide hydrate will tend to rise near the surface of the water in the prechamber 1108, where it will accumulate and form a hydrate-rich layer through which 15 the exhaust gas bubbles. On the other hand, because the large volume of exhaust gas rising through the water in the prechamber 1108 will cause extreme turbidity, the hydrogen sulfide hydrate is unlikely to separate out naturally by means of gravity fractionation. Therefore, in the case of a water-filled prechamber 1108, the prechamber will have to be flushed periodically, which precludes operating the process on a continuous basis.

20 [0144] Alternatively, if the prechamber 1108 is pressurized and largely gas-filled (which actually is preferred), a spray of water 1109 taken from the heat exchange system 1107 can be used to wash and cool the exhaust gas efficiently while allowing hydrogen sulfide hydrates to form. The water spray fills all but the lower part of the prechamber with a mist of droplets that fall to the bottom of the vessel. (Water evaporating out of the mist and subsequently passing into 25 the hydrate formation vessel 1111 would simply become part of the fresh water product.) Solid matter and any hydrogen sulfide hydrate that forms is separated from the wash water, which is heated as it cools the exhaust gas, by means of separation filter 1110. (A separation filter 1110 may also be used in an embodiment in which the prechamber 1108 is pressurized and water-filled, as described immediately above, to filter the wash water.) The solid waste will consist of 30 concentrated hazardous materials that must be disposed of according to recognized practices, and the heated wash water is passed back into the heat exchange system 1107.

[0145] After it has been cooled sufficiently by intercoolers 1113 for hydrate to form spontaneously under operational pressure and temperature conditions, e.g., by processes as

described previously for cooling the input water, the fully preprocessed exhaust gas 1102' then passes into hydrate formation vessel 1111. The hydrate formation vessel 1111 is pressurized and is configured essentially the same as the pressurized hydrate formation vessel shown in FIG. 17 or, to the extent it is configured for the production of negatively buoyant hydrate, the pressurized vessel shown in FIG. 18. As is the case with those two embodiments, saline or polluted water and the exhaust gas containing the carbon dioxide are introduced into the hydrate formation vessel 1111 and pressure and temperature conditions are controlled so as to form carbon dioxide hydrate, as described previously. (As in the previous embodiments, this will be done on a batch basis as opposed to continuously.) Residual gases such as nitrogen oxide are purged from the system.

[0146] The carbon dioxide hydrate 1112 is then transferred to pressurized hydrate dissociation vessel 1114, which may be located below the hydrate formation vessel 1111 as shown in FIG. 17 or, as shown in FIG. 20, adjacent to the hydrate formation vessel (similarly to as shown in FIG. 18). The hydrate dissociation vessel 1114 is shown in greater detail in FIG. 22.

15 It is generally similar to the pressurized hydrate dissociation vessels shown in FIGS. 17 and 18, but differs in that a heating element 1115, which preferably constitutes part of the system's heat exchange subsystem 1107, is provided along with an additional outlet 1120 for the removal of liquid carbon dioxide from the vessel. Concentrated carbon dioxide hydrate slurry is introduced into the vessel 1114, as described previously, and the introduction of it into the vessel is controlled by means of valve mechanism 1122 so that the carbon dioxide hydrate slurry is introduced on a batch basis. (This is necessary because the pressure in the hydrate dissociation vessel will rise to greater than that in the hydrate formation vessel 1111.) Alternatively, in-line slurry pumps can be used to maintain higher pressure in the downstream hydrate dissociation vessel. The hydrate is held in the upper part of the vessel 1114 by a screen 1113 within the tray 20 1124, where the hydrate dissociates.

[0147] By controlling the temperature and pressure conditions within the vessel 1114, dissociation of the carbon dioxide hydrate is managed so as to produce fresh water (as described above in connection with the previous embodiments) and liquid carbon dioxide (in contrast to gaseous carbon dioxide). In particular, as shown in FIG. 23, when the hydrate is introduced into 30 the dissociation vessel 1114, it is introduced under pressure and temperature conditions in the hydrate stability field in the vicinity of point A, *i.e.*, under conditions at which the hydrate remains stable. (Pressure within the dissociation vessel 1114 may be controlled by means of a pneumatic standpipe 1126 by admitting an inert gas into the standpipe using valve 1128.) The

temperature within the dissociation vessel 1114 may then be permitted to rise, e.g., by absorbing heat from the surroundings or, more preferably, is caused to rise by actively adding heat removed from the hot exhaust gas back into the system via heat exchanger 1115. Alternatively, the temperature may be caused to rise advantageously by passing the hot exhaust gas around the 5 dissociation vessel 1114 through conduits (not shown) before the exhaust gas is preprocessed in means 1106 and 1108.

[0148] As heat being input from the heat exchange system causes the temperature to rise, the system moves to the right along P-T path 1130 and crosses phase boundary 1132, at which point the hydrate dissociates into carbon dioxide gas and fresh water. Because the vessel is 10 sealed, however, as the hydrate continues to dissociate, the pressure and accordingly the temperature continue to rise. As the temperature and pressure increase, the system continues to move toward the right along P-T path 1130, but the pressure rises at a sufficient rate that the P-T curve 1130 along which the system moves crosses below the carbon dioxide liquidus, and the carbon dioxide gas condenses to carbon dioxide liquid, as illustrated at point B. (Point B 15 represents just an example of the system temperature/pressure conditions at which dissociation is complete; the exact conditions are less important than making sure that the final pressure/temperature conditions within the hydrate dissociation vessel lie within the field of stability for liquid carbon dioxide.) In operation, the system may pass relatively quickly through the portion of the phase diagram in which carbon dioxide gas exists. In those instances, the 20 hydrate will essentially dissociate directly into carbon dioxide liquid and pure water.

[0149] Alternatively, by controlling the pressurization of the dissociation vessel 1114 using the gas valve 1128, pressure can be increased sufficiently fast so that the carbon dioxide never enters the gas phase. The system will then move along P-T curve 1130' through the lower, 25 hydrate stability zone 1132 and directly into the liquid carbon dioxide/water zone 1134. In either case, however, the result is the essentially immediate production of liquid carbon dioxide and fresh water.

[0150] Non-hydrate-forming components of the exhaust gas, such as nitrogen oxides and nitrogen, will be released from the system through valve-controlled purge system 1150 once the liquid carbon dioxide and water are removed from the system.

30 [0151] (As yet another, less preferred alternative, if pressure in the system is controlled so as not to rise as high as in these two embodiments, gaseous carbon dioxide instead of liquid carbon dioxide will be released. In that case, the gaseous carbon dioxide can be removed from the hydrate dissociation vessel 1114 at the relatively high gas pressures of the vessel but below

those required for hydrate stability (e.g., two hundred to three hundred atmospheres pressure) and compressed to liquid carbon dioxide at relatively low temperature using industry standard apparatus and methods. Compressing the pressurized carbon dioxide from the already pressurized gaseous state to the liquid state would still be easier -- and hence less expensive -- 5 than the case where gaseous carbon dioxide is compressed to liquid carbon dioxide from approximately normal atmospheric pressure.)

[0152] As illustrated in FIG. 24, at the pressure and temperature conditions that exist at the dissociation end point B, the liquid carbon dioxide will be positively buoyant with respect to the fresh water produced from dissociation of the carbon dioxide hydrate. Moreover, the liquid 10 carbon dioxide and the fresh water are essentially immiscible. Accordingly, the liquid carbon dioxide will float on top of the fresh water released by the hydrate, with an interface 1152 (FIG. 22) between the two. The fresh water is then extracted by valve-controlled outlet 1154, and the liquid carbon dioxide is extracted by valve controlled outlet 1120. The fresh water will be saturated with dissolved carbon dioxide and may contain micro-droplets of liquid carbon 15 dioxide that can be withdrawn under pressure. The fresh water may then be used for any desired purpose, e.g., drinking water, and the carbon dioxide may be transported away quite conveniently in its liquid form and either used in a variety of existing commercial applications or disposed of (e.g., by being pumped to great ocean depths for sequestration.) Any residual saline water, which will settle to the very bottom of the system, is extracted via a valve-controlled outlet 1156, as 20 described previously, and disposed of. Preferably, even though the carbon dioxide and water are essentially immiscible, a conduit 1158, arranged to carry the more dense fresh water down below the less dense liquid carbon dioxide, is provided extending from the bottom of the tray 1124 so that the separated water can flow downward without having to flow through the carbon dioxide.

[0153] Finally, FIG. 22 shows the system input water as passing through the dissociation 25 vessel 1114 as in the previously described embodiments. It will be appreciated, however, that because heat is being added to the system through the heat exchange system 1007 so as to move the temperature to the right in the phase diagram shown in FIG. 23, less heat will be absorbed out of the input water by the endothermic dissociation of the hydrate, and therefore the input water will not be chilled to the same extent as in the previously described embodiments. Accordingly, 30 additional supplemental cooling may be necessary in order for the hydrate to be formed.

[0154] Finally, although just a single one of each is shown, more than one dry processing/preprocessing apparatus 1105, prechamber 1108, hydrate formation vessel 1111, and/or hydrate dissociation vessel 1114 may be employed in a single installation. For example, it

may be desirable or even necessary to cycle the exhaust gas a number of times prior to introducing it into the hydrate formation vessel 1111 in order to reduce the levels of non-carbon dioxide materials which otherwise might cause the water to taste poor.

[0155] In still further embodiments of the invention, a desalination apparatus is disclosed 5 which utilizes both natural and artificial pressurization in the desalination apparatus to achieve pressurization suitable for the spontaneous formation of hydrate. This embodiment, illustrated in FIG. 25, comprises a hydrate formation and residual water separation section 1200, and a dissociation section 1204, as described above for example in connection with FIG. 2. In this embodiment, however, the entire desalination fractionation column is pressurized both artificially 10 and naturally to achieve the beneficial attributes of both methods. In particular, the upper part of the apparatus is artificially pressurized and the lower part of the shaft is pressurized both by the weight of the column of water and the pressure at the top of the column. (The pressure produced by about 10 m of seawater is equivalent to one atmosphere pressure.) This varies with the local gravity fields and with the density of the water to be treated. These differences will be taken into 15 account in the design of each installation. The artificial pressure 'x' atm (pressure in atmospheres) produced by the pressure balance reservoir 1219, as illustrated in FIG. 25, added to the shaft pressure produced by the weight of water (expressed as 'y' meters depth) 1206, results in a lower shaft pressure of 'x' + 'y' atmospheres at the bottom of the column 1208, which is suitable for allowing gas hydrate to form spontaneously. For example, if the artificial pressurization from 20 pump 1219 is approximately 20 atm, and the fractionation column 1206 is approximately 300m ("y"), then the pressure at the base of the column 1208 will be about 50 atmospheres, or 20 atm ("x") and 30 atm ("y").

[0156] As illustrated in FIG. 25, a water intake apparatus is shown for providing a supply 25 of intake water to the desalination apparatus 1200. In one embodiment, the supply of intake water is provided through intake T1 (1215) which is preferably located in relatively shallow water. The intake water from T1 is pumped through the pump and pressure regulating apparatus 1216 and into the desalination apparatus 1200 near the hydrate formation section as illustrated in FIG. 25 and described in previous embodiments. The intake water from T1 will be pumped to a pressure (via pumps not shown but known and understood by persons skilled in the art) that is 30 about equivalent to the pressure which is artificially maintained in the upper part of the dissociation section 1204.

[0157] In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the intake water is obtained from a deep water intake T2 at water intake 1210. The deep water intake T2 reaches to the

pressure depth 'x' in the ocean ('x' pressure depth expressed as meters depth) 1212 that is, preferably, about equivalent to the minimum pressure in the top of the apparatus or the pressure which is artificially maintained in the upper part of the dissociation section 1204 ('x' pressure in atmospheres). For example, if the minimum pressure at the top of the desalination fractionation apparatus is 20 atmospheres (equivalent to about 200 m water depth), then the depth in 'x' meters of the water intake T2 is, preferably, 200 m. Obtaining the intake water from depth will have the effect of reducing considerably the amount of energy required to pump water to operating pressure 'x' in the upper region of the desalination apparatus 1200. Other advantages of taking water from depth are that it is cleaner and it contains less modern industrial pollution and chemicals (e.g., PCB). Further, water at depth is generally cooler than surface water and thus requires less cooling, and maintains a more stable year-round temperature which would allow for more efficient operation of the desalination fractionation apparatus. This embodiment, among other things, facilitates balancing the pressure in the system as a whole, from the intake at depth to the pressurized desalination fractionation column, and possibly beyond.

[0158] As illustrated in FIG. 25, the intake water can come from either T1 or T2, or a combination of both. In the embodiment where the water comes from water intake T2, the intake assembly will consist of one or more large diameter intake pipes 1214 strong enough to safely contain the artificial pressurization throughout. The lower part of the pipe assembly and primary filtering apparatus (as described in previous embodiments) are preferably designed to take account of the higher ambient pressures and thus does not need to be fabricated as strongly. The intake pipes are preferably large enough to be inspected and maintained by remotely operated underwater vehicles, specialized types of which are now common in the offshore industry and can be modified for these purposes. In order to provide for continuous operation of the desalination fractionation column and to provide for an unbroken supply of fresh water, it is preferable to have multiple pressurization facilities 1216 that will allow for maintenance, pump load-sharing, and redundancy in case of emergency. For example, in one embodiment (not shown), the intake pipes can be split at a manifold into three separate, parallel branches, each containing similar pumps and fluid pressure control apparatus. In one embodiment, one branch could be used for current operations, one branch for maintenance, and one branch could be used as a spare. In this configuration, continuous flow of intake water is guaranteed.

[0159] One-way valves at the intake pump site (not shown) and elsewhere in the intake assembly will prevent blow-down, although the pressure at the intake should counterbalance any pressure-loss in the assembly as a whole. In case of pressure loss in the desalination

fractionation column, the intake water will not empty from the intake as the input from the pump assembly will lie below sea level 1218, or at or below artificial pressurization provided when the intake water is from T1.

[0160] Pressure is maintained in the hydrate desalination fractionation apparatus by 5 pressure balance reservoir systems 1219 which, in one embodiment, pressurizes a volume of gas so as to exert hydraulic force throughout the volume of fluid, and which are similar to those described in previous embodiments. More than one dissociation chamber may be used in conjunction with each hydrate formation column, similar to embodiments already described. Where dissociation takes place under controlled pressure conditions, turbulence in the fluid-gas 10 mixture and the most efficient separation of gas and fluid participants are optimized for best performance. As also described in previous embodiments, by reducing the pressure difference between the dissociation stage and the hydrate formation stage, the pumping required for compressing hydrate-forming gas is also reduced which potentially substantially lowers the operating cost. Moreover, controlled variation of the artificial pressure can be used to control the 15 dissociation rate of the hydrate.

[0161] Recovering the hydrate-forming gas produced from dissociation at the elevated pressure in this embodiment is highly advantageous to reducing energy required to pump the gas to pressures where it can be injected in the hydrate-forming section of the desalination fractionation system. As previously described, the volume of gas to be handled is reduced 20 because it is already pressurized well above atmospheric pressure. In addition, preferably, its volume would only have to be reduced by pumping to somewhat less than half its volume, which would use much less energy than pumping it from atmospheric pressure to the hydrate-forming pressure, which would require halving its volume many times.

[0162] Because the output water 1220 will be at the same pressure as its output level in 25 the apparatus, the energy residing in this pressure can be utilized in several manners. Although some additional energy may be required by the pre-1216 and post-1222 desalination fractionation column pumps and other apparatus, which preferably will include 2-way pressure shut-down valves, the potential energy inherent in the produced water will be considerable energy. In the first instance, it can be used to drive the water upward against gravity, such as for example 30 through outlet 1224, to a level approximately equal to its atmospheric pressure equivalent of altitude. Thus, if the output water is maintained at 20 atmospheres (equivalent to about 200 m of water pressure), the head of water will naturally drive upward to about this altitude.

[0163] Direct energy recovery from the pressurized product water and also the extracted residual water can be accomplished in many ways. For example, in one embodiment, the pressurized output water, such as for example through outlet 1228, can be passed through hydroelectric generating plant as part of the pressure step-down process for water which is to be used locally. In view of the fact that the desalination installations described here are preferably very large, the scale of power generation could be substantial.

[0164] In another embodiment of the present invention, the partially artificially pressurized apparatus can be installed in those places where topographic depressions extend to below sea level such as, for example, in the Salton Sea area of Southern California, the Dead Sea depression and the watershed of the Middle East. For example, in the desalination apparatus 1302 illustrated in FIG. 26, the artificial pressure is produced by the head of the weight of water contained in the intake apparatus rather than by artificial pumping. In this geographical situation, a desalination fractionation installation can be established well away from the sea without the cost of pumping water. The intake pipe 1306, once pumped full of water using by-pass pumps 15 (not shown), can act as a syphon. The by-pass pumps preferably can be separated from the main water stream to reduce turbulence and remain as emergency pumps if the intake pipe assembly needs to be refilled. Essentially, once the pipe 1306 is filled it will become a syphon through which water will spontaneously flow from the sea to below the sea level in the topographic depression 1310.

20 [0165] The desalination apparatus 1302 illustrated in FIG. 26 is constructed as described above in connection with previous embodiments.

[0166] The opening of the intake pipe 1306 is preferably placed in as shallow water as possible to allow the siphon effect to lift water over topographic elevations higher than sea level so that the head of water in the depression is as high as possible. All intakes preferably include 25 primary screening systems that allow for in-situ maintenance and cleaning without shutting down water intake within the assembly as a whole. Alternatively, the intake can be implemented with a water lift that operates by the suction at the shallow water intake under the negative pressure caused by the siphon effect. This will allow drawing of some deep water along with the shallow water, which will have the effect of allowing somewhat cooler and cleaner water to be brought 30 into the pipe from deeper sea levels. A water lift intake consists of an intake pipe that extends into deeper water but has provisions for varying the size of the shallow water intake. The principal of this waterlift intake is similar to diver-operated airlift devices used for excavating fine sediment without disturbing local visibility from the location where the sediment is being

removed. In the airlift, compressed air is bled into the bottom of a pipe which is oriented in a generally upright position with the top tilted down-current. As the air ascends it pulls water along with it, exerting a suction effect on water and sediment at the open lower end of the pipe.

[0167] In this water lift intake, the water being pulled in the shallow water opening by the

5 negative pressure of the syphon effect produced by the pressure difference between the intake end and the depression end of the intake, imparts a mild secondary suction effect on water at deeper levels in the pipe. By varying the size of the intake by the use of sliding or rotating sieve, gate or other valve types or other water flow control devices, the secondary suction effect is controlled so that the lift of deeper water is optimized for the intake system, given the other 10 operating considerations as a whole. Suction is varied so as to establish momentum of the rising slug of deep water. The mild suction is adequate to lift considerable deep water, especially once upward momentum of the deep water slug within the pipe has been established, because the weight head is only a function of the different density of the seawater at depth and near the surface, and this difference is small (although site and season-dependant). The depth from which 15 water can be lifted is balanced by a greater weight of water necessary to allow the syphon effect to function. This means that the topographic elevation below sea level in the depression side of the intake pipe below which the syphon effect will operate is lower than if the total of the water was being drawn from shallow water depths.

[0168] Alternatively, where the desired pressure at the site of the desalination

20 fractionation column may be higher than desired with the full fall of the head of water, the intake can be placed in deeper water in the sea. In the case where pressure may be higher than desired with a full fall of the head of water in the depression, a hydroelectric generating installation can be placed at an intermediate altitude below the depth below sea level in the depression and the desalination fractionation column. Each intake site for a desalination fractionation column,
25 location of hydroelectric plants, and the lay out with regard to topography to achieve the desired pressure-head of water is site specific and many variations are possible depending on desired water throughput and the incorporation of hydroelectric and other associated industrial plant

[0169] In effect, the total pressure in the embodiment is entirely the result of natural pressurization, but controlled so that the effect is that of the partially artificially pressurized apparatus. In the first instance the 'artificial' pressure is provided by the weight of water in the intake assembly below sea level in the depression, or in a portion of the intake assembly to provide the desired pressures. This is treated in the apparatus as a whole, however, as pressure that is being induced from outside of the desalination fractionation itself. The pump and pressure

regulating apparatus 1316 includes provision for cut off and diversion of high pressure water coming into it, in addition to the ability to control the flow into the desalination fractionation column, which might otherwise become over pressured above design specifications.

[0170] As also illustrated by FIG. 26, maximum energy can be recovered by passing both

5 the product water and residue water (such as, for example, the product water 1220 and the residue water 1234 illustrated in FIG. 25) through hydroelectric plant illustrated at 1320.

Although there is a likelihood that some of the product water will be autopumped uphill under its own inherent pressure, virtually all the residue water can be passed through a hydroelectric plant prior to passing into settling or drying pans in the depression. The placement of hydroelectric 10 apparatus, which also acts as a pressure reducer, may depend on both engineering and electric transmission considerations. Hydroelectric apparatus on the incoming line is preferably separate from the facility that maintains pressure within the dissociation fractionation apparatus itself.

[0171] In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 26, there is preferably no return of residue water produced as a byproduct of the hydrate desalination process. Thus, the environment from 15 which the water to be treated is extracted is unaffected, except by the inflow of more seawater.

The desalination can be operated to produce as much fresh water as possible because the residue water preferably becomes industrial feedstock for the production of sea salts and elevating its salinity to a maximum is desirable. In both of the aforementioned examples of locations in 20 which installations of this embodiment might be established, such industrial salt operations are already established. Delivery of both fresh and highly saline residue water are thus both desirable.

[0172] In another embodiment of the present invention, input water is cooled by passing it through a heat exchanger (e.g. a series of input risers or pipes) that rise through the dissociating hydrate in a dissociation chamber. As the input water rises in the heat exchanger, it continually 25 encounters colder water than itself which allows for efficient cooling of the input water. This reduces the demand for cooling of fresh water produced by dissociation, which cannot cool the input water below the temperature of the produced fresh water at the level it was produced in the dissociation chamber (assuming temperature equilibration). Where produced water in the lower part of the dissociation chamber equilibrates in temperature with the input water in the heat 30 exchanger at that elevation, it does not again come into contact with water that has already exchanged heat because the general flow of water in the intergranular water slurry is downward in the hydrate slurry, while the input water being cooled rises in the heat exchanger. In other words, as the input water rises up the heat exchanger, it continues to cool, and temperature-

equilibrated produced water continues to move downward. Thus, there will be an effective temperature stratification in the hydrate slurry/produced water which will be colder upward. Because the process will be highly dynamic, with hydrate continually rising along with the dissociated gas, and produced water being displaced physically downward by the production of new produced water in a continuous process, and the density differences of the different temperature produced water will not be significantly different, little mixing and turbidity from gravity fractionation within the produced water is anticipated.

[0173] In still another embodiment of the present invention, a dissociation section is disclosed which enables cooling of intake water in stages across the dissociation section. As illustrated in FIG. 27, a dissociation section 1404 is provided with baffles 1402 which are installed across the chamber in the direction of the movement of input water 1406. Baffles 1402, which preferably close the dissociation chamber 1404 at the top, effectively segment all but the lower part of the dissociation section 1404. By way of example only, FIG. 27 illustrates four cooling segments created by the baffles 1402, each designated by "1", "2", etc. Of course, more or fewer segments could be created.

[0174] Hydrate filling the section 1404 under its own buoyancy will wash downward the interstitial residual fluids, which will have the effect of driving downward the interface between fresh and saline water in the apparatus as a whole. The input water heat exchanger 1407 passes through hydrate that is continuously concentrating and dissociating at the top of the chamber 1404 in the cooling segments 1-4. As the input water 1406 continues along the heat exchange piping 1407, it continues to cool, and temperature-equilibrated produced water continues to move downward. The water produced near the inlet of the input water 1406 in the first cooling segment (designated by "1") will equilibrate in temperature with the input water in the heat exchange piping 1407. The water produced in cooling segment "1" will preferably not again come into contact with the heat exchanger 1407 that passes through the disassociation section 1404.

[0175] The input water 1406 becomes progressively cooler as it passes through each segment 1-4 of the dissociation section 1404. Output water 1408 is further cooled across the final stage. Cooling can be staged in a number of ways depending on the temperature of the input water, the heat requirements of the dissociation reaction (which depends on the specific hydrate and gas or gas mixture), and the rate at which the dissociation is run in the controlled situation of a partially artificially pressurized embodiment. For example, in one embodiment, temperatures at the exits for the stages are preferably: first stage, 15 °C; second stage, 10 °C,

third stage, 5 °C; fourth stage exit 1-2 °C. The precise temperature distribution in the input water in its course through the dissociation chamber or chambers, whether the input water is recirculated, and the number of stages, and other operational considerations that affect design will depend on circumstances such as the water throughput, the degree of water extraction by 5 hydrate and other thermal and flow inefficiencies, as well as the temperature of the input water and the degree to which the input water temperature and other properties will vary.

[0176] In an alternative aspect of this embodiment, mechanical distribution of hydrate to each of the dissociation/heat exchanger segments is provided. The structure for mechanically distributing the hydrate is preferably located in the upper part of the apparatus shaft where the 10 hydrate is flowing buoyantly upward or the lower part of the dissociation chamber 1404. In one example, steerable baffles (not shown) whose orientation can be altered to accept more or less of the buoyant hydrate into the desired chamber can be used. The control process is preferably interactive, with real-time monitoring being used by the control computer to distribute hydrate to achieve the desired cooling effects.

15 [0177] Ideally, the input water is stabilized at preferably approximately 4°C or below (target temperature is preferably approximately 1°C-2°C). This is because below that temperature, the density of the water increases, which enhances separation of the hydrate-water slurry formed by injections of the gas.

[0178] In the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 27, the fresh water, grey water and residual water are taken off in a similar manner as described in previous embodiments. For example, the fresh water is taken off at take-off valve 1410; the grey water is taken off at take-off valve 1412; the residual water is taken off from shaft 1420. Further, in accordance with this embodiment, the gas from the dissociated hydrate is collected by gas collector 1416 and take-off from dissociation section. Gas pressure balancing pump and pressure tank system are illustrated by 1426. The gas take-off return to gas treatment and return system is illustrated at 1428.

[0179] In yet another embodiment of the invention, hydrate dissociation is controlled to achieve the desired enhanced cooling of the intake water, enhanced production of fresh water, as well as reduced turbidity within the fluid slurry which will also enhance production of fresh water. Control of hydrate dissociation can be achieved in two preferable ways, which can be combined or alternated in operation. In one of these modes of operation, continuous formation of hydrate at the base of the shaft 1208 (FIG. 25) is maintained by controlling the pressure in the upper part of the dissociation section of the apparatus so that it is approximately the same over the entire time that fresh water is to be produced. The maintenance of the dissociation section

pressurization by pumping (artificial means), when added to the natural pressurization provided by the weight of water in the shaft, produces pressures suitable for continuous, spontaneous formation of hydrate (given low enough water temperature). The continuous formation of hydrate is matched by continuous dissociation of hydrate and continuous formation of fresh

5 water.

[0180] Substantial benefit may occur, however, when the artificial pressure is varied under closely controlled conditions. The aim of this variation is to enhance the effect of cooling of intake water or secondary refrigeration systems. This effect is achieved by increasing artificial pressure within the apparatus, which will enhance the hydrate formation at the base of the shaft,

10 and allows hydrate to rise to high levels within the dissociation fractionation apparatus. The increase in artificial pressurization has the effect of raising the depth of the hydrate stability zone and its phase boundary. With appropriate artificial pressurization, hydrate can be maintained in a stable or mesostable state until it is entirely within the dissociation section. Thus, the cooling effect of heat absorption of the dissociation is concentrated in the uppermost parts of the

15 apparatus where the heat exchangers with the intake water are located. Controlling pressure also will lead to the hydrate being more highly concentrated during dissociation so that there will be less mixing with interstitial water that forms the liquid between hydrate grains, and thus the production of fresh water will be enhanced. Arresting dissociation below the dissociation section will also reduce turbidity within the fluid slurry and inhibit mixing, which will also enhance

20 production of fresh water.

[0181] Varying pressure in a controlled fashion will also allow for close control of the dissociation process itself, which can be optimized for both fresh water production and cooling, as desired. At slow rates of dissociation, maintained by higher relative pressures, both cooling and fresh water production are inhibited, but the product water may be more pure. At high rates 25 of dissociation, where the hydrate begins to dissociate further down in the shaft, fresh water production is enhanced but the cooling effect is minimized. The precise operating procedures will depend on the temperature of the input water, the hydrate-forming gas or gas mixture used, and the water production requirements, amongst other requirements.

[0182] Varying the artificial pressurization may have the effect of varying the rate of 30 hydrate production in the base of the shaft. In some instances, when the artificial component of pressure is lowered sufficiently, pressures in the base of the shaft will not be sufficient to form hydrate spontaneously. This is because sufficient artificial pressure is required in addition to the pressurization caused by the weight of water in the column. In this instance, which may be

utilized when maximum cooling or some other operation requirement is desired, production of hydrate may be operated in a periodic or cyclical manner rather than continuously. Production of fresh water may also be periodic or cyclical, and at high enough artificial pressurization, hydrate can be allowed to concentrate under the force of its buoyancy at the top of the dissociation

5 section before pressure is allowed to decrease below a pressure where hydrate begins to dissociate spontaneously.

[0183] Although particular and specific embodiments of the invention have been disclosed in some detail, numerous modifications will occur to those having skill in the art, which modifications hold true to the spirit of this invention. Such modifications are deemed to

10 be within the scope of the following claims.